

South Africa

It's no wonder that South Africa draws more visitors than anywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. World-class wildlife-watching, cosmopolitan cities, stunning natural panoramas and vibrant cultures make the country appealing to almost every taste and budget. Geographically, its extremes include the arid semidesert of the Karoo, the snowcapped peaks of the Drakensberg Range, the lush subtropical coast of KwaZulu-Natal and the fertile temperate valleys of Western Cape. Within the space of a day, you can journey from vineyard-clad hillsides in the Western Cape to the vast open spaces of the Kalahari; from Cape Town's waterfront chic to isolated Zulu villages; from elephant-spotting in Kruger National Park to the sublime seascapes of the coast.

While it's easy to focus on the glitz and developed infrastructure, you'll only get below the surface by seeking out the country's other face – most visible in the sprawling townships where far too many people live stalked by the shadows of hunger, poverty and one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the world. Behind its incredible natural beauty, South Africa is the stage for the daily drama of one of the world's greatest experiments in racial harmony. The intensity of this drama surrounds you wherever you go, and is likely to be one of the most fascinating and challenging aspects of your travels.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1,233,404 sq km
- **ATMs** Found in most cities and large towns
- **Borders** Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho
- **Budget** US\$25 to US\$50 a day
- **Capital** Pretoria (administrative), Bloemfontein (judicial) and Cape Town (legislative)
- **Languages** 11 (English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Sepedi, Setswana, Sotho, Swati, Tshivenda, Xhosa, Xitsonga, and Zulu)
- **Money** Rand; US\$1 = R7.4
- **Population** 46.9 million
- **Seasons** Cape Town: cold & wet (May to August); sunny & warm (September to May); Durban & Johannesburg: dry (May to September); wet (October to April)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 27; international access ☎ 09
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 2
- **Visa** Free, 90-day entry permits issued on arrival to citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Cape Town** (p993) Marvel at the city's majestic setting and take a tippie tour of the area's wineries.
- **Kruger National Park** (p1026) Stay in a remote bushveld camp and fall asleep to the sounds of grunting hippos.
- **Drakensberg Mountains** (p1013) Hike the peaks of Royal Natal National Park's magnificent Amphitheatre.
- **Wild Coast** (p1005) Bum around the spectacular beaches, hidden waterfalls and isolated reserves.
- **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p1028) Become hypnotised by the vast and beautiful expanses of the Kalahari.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

South Africa has been favoured by nature with one of the most temperate climates on the African continent, and can be visited comfortably any time. Winter (June to September) is cooler and drier, and ideal for hiking and outdoor pursuits. Because vegetation is less dense, and thirsty animals congregate around water sources, winter is also the best time for wildlife-watching.

Summer (late November to March) brings rain, mists and – in the lowveld – some uncomfortably hot days. Along the Indian Ocean coast, conditions are sultry and tropical, with high humidity.

More of a consideration than weather are school holidays. From mid-December to January, waves of vacation-hungry South Africans stream out of the cities, with visitors from Europe and North America adding to the crush. The absolute peak is from Christmas to mid-January, followed by Easter. Accommodation in tourist areas and national parks is heavily booked, and prices can increase by more than double.

Spring (mid-September to November) and autumn (April and May) are ideal almost everywhere. Spring is also the best time to see vast expanses of Northern Cape carpeted with wildflowers.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** Using Johannesburg (p1015) as a gateway, head east to Kruger National Park (p1026), South Africa's most convenient safari showpiece. The teeming wildlife here will undoubtedly hold you captivated for at least several days. From

HOW MUCH?

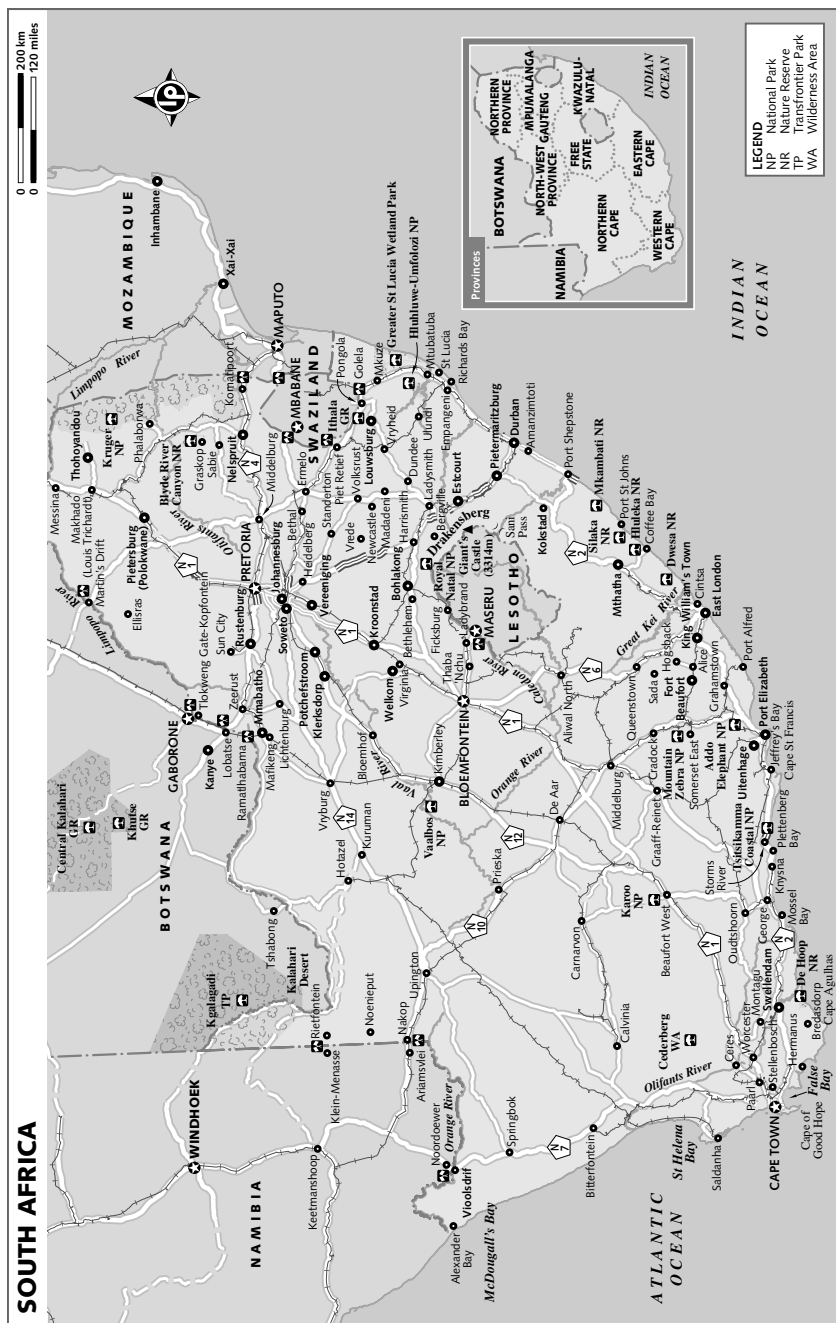
- **Bottle of wine** US\$9
- **Car hire per day** US\$40
- **1k of mangoes** US\$0.80
- **Kruger National Park entry** US\$16
- **Surfboard** US\$200

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.72
- **1L water** US\$0.90
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$8
- **Roasted mealie** US\$0.30

Kruger, head south into KwaZulu-Natal, where the dramatic valleys and peaks of the Drakensberg Mountains and Royal Natal National Park (p1014) provide an endless array of excellent hikes. Head up Sani Pass (p1015) to the Lesotho border for breathtaking views before returning to the throbbing heart of the country to get a taste of township life in Soweto (p1018).

- **One Month** After a few days in Cape Town (p993) and a trip to the top of Table Mountain (p996), tear yourself away from this wonderful city and head to the fertile valleys of the Winelands, with a night or two in Stellenbosch (p1001) and then via the scenic Route 62 through the Little Karoo to Oudtshoorn (p1002), South Africa's ostrich capital. Make your way south, joining the N2 along the Garden Route, near Knysna (p1002), with its sylvan setting, and Plettenberg Bay (p1003), a relaxed beachside resort town. Be sure to stop at Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park (p1003) along the coast. Move eastwards through the striking Wild Coast (p1005), before spending a day or so on the beach in Durban (p1007). Head north into the heart of Zululand (p1013) or the Drakensberg (p1013) or continue north for as much time as possible enjoying the parks, including the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (p1012) and Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (p1012) before returning to Durban or making your way to Johannesburg for the flight home.



HISTORY

The earliest recorded inhabitants of this area of Africa were the San (Bushmen) and the closely related Khoikhoi (Hottentots). The next arrivals were Bantu-speaking tribes who, by the 11th century, had settled the northeast and the east coast and, by the 15th century, most of the eastern half of South Africa. These tribes were pastoral but had trade links throughout the region. They were Iron Age peoples, and the smelting techniques of some tribes were not surpassed in Europe until the Industrial Revolution.

The Dutch East India Company established the first European settlement in South Africa at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. The settlers developed a close-knit community with their own dialect (Afrikaans) and Calvinist sect (the Dutch Reformed Church). Slaves were imported from other parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Over the next 150 years, the colonists spread east, coming into violent contact with Bantu tribes. In 1779 the eastward expansion of the Boers (Dutch-Afrikaner farmers) was temporarily halted by the Xhosa in the first Bantu War.

Further Boer expansion was hastened after the British annexed the Cape in 1806. The abolition of slavery in 1834 was regarded by the Boers as an intolerable interference in their affairs, and led to migration across the Orange River two years later. This became known as the Great Trek.

Pressure on the Bantu from both the Boers and the British caused political and social changes among the tribes of the Natal area, resulting in the rise of the Zulu king, Shaka, in the early 19th century. His policy of total war on neighbouring tribes caused immense suffering and mass migration in a period known as the *difaqane* (the scattering).

The Boers came into this chaos in search of new lands, and the British were not far behind them. The Zulu were eventually defeated, but relations between the Boers and the British remained tense – particularly after the formation of the Boer republics of the Free State and the Transvaal.

Diamonds were discovered in 1867 at Kimberley, followed by the discovery of gold in 1886 on the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Jo'burg). The Boer republics were flooded with British capital and immigrants, which created resentment among Boer farmers.

The British imperialist Cecil Rhodes encouraged a rebellion among the heavily taxed – but nonvoting – English-speaking miners in the Transvaal, with a view to destabilising the Boer republics and encouraging British intervention. The resulting tensions led to the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War.

The war ended with the defeat of the Boer republics and the imposition of British rule over the whole country. Britain had pursued a scorched-earth policy to combat Boer guerrillas, destroying homes, crops and livestock. During this time more than 26,000 Afrikaner women and children died in the world's first concentration camps.

Independence & Apartheid

In 1910 the Union of South Africa was created, which gave political control to the whites. Inevitably, this prompted black resistance in the form of strikes, and political organisations were formed. Despite the moderate tone of these early resistance groups, the government reacted by intensifying repression.

The Afrikaner National Party won the election in 1948. It went even further in excluding nonwhites from having any political or economic power, and the security forces brutally enforced its laws. Violence was a routine method of reaction to any opposition or protest. The suppression of black resistance ranged from the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the shooting of school children in Soweto in 1976, to the forcible evacuation and bulldozing of squatter settlements and the systematic torture – even murder – of political activists, such as Steve Biko.

One of the most important organisations to oppose the racist legislation was the African National Congress (ANC). As it became obvious that the white rulers were unwilling to undertake even the most cosmetic reforms, guerrilla warfare became the preferred option for the ANC. In the early 1960s, many ANC leaders were arrested, charged with treason and imprisoned for long periods; the most famous of those was Nelson Mandela.

The system of apartheid was entrenched even further in the early 1970s by the creation of the so-called Black homelands of Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and Venda. These were, in theory, 'independent' countries. By creating the homelands, all blacks within white-designated South Africa were deemed foreign guest-workers and as such were

without political rights. Any black person without a residence pass could be 'deported' to a homeland.

Meanwhile, South Africa was becoming an isolated case in the face of successful liberation struggles in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, which brought Marxist-leaning governments into power. As a result, a war psychosis came to dominate government thinking, and resulted in the invasion of southern Angola by South African armed forces. The South African Government also gave encouragement to counter-revolutionary guerrilla groups in both Mozambique and Angola, and refused to enter into genuine negotiations for the independence of Namibia.

The international community finally began to oppose the apartheid regime, and the UN imposed economic and political sanctions. The government made some concessions, including the establishment of a farcical new parliament of whites, coloureds (people of mixed race) and Indians – but no blacks.

The 'reforms' did nothing to ease sanctions. After the 1989 elections the new president, FW de Klerk, instituted a program that was aimed not only at dismantling the apartheid system, but also at introducing democracy. The release of political prisoners on 11 February 1990 (including Nelson Mandela), the repeal of the Group Areas Act (which set up the homelands), and the signing of a peace accord with the ANC and other opposition groups all opened the way for hard-fought negotiations on the path to majority rule.

The Post-Apartheid Era

The country's first democratic elections took place in 1994, and across the country at midnight on 26–27 April, *Die Stem* (the old national anthem) was sung and the old flag was lowered. A new rainbow flag was raised and the new anthem, *Nkosi Sikelele Afrika* (God Bless Africa), was sung. In the past people had been jailed for singing this beautiful anthem.

In the first democratic election in the country's history, the ANC won 62.7% of the vote; 66.7% would have enabled it to overrule the interim constitution. The National Party won 20.4% of the vote, enough to guarantee it representation in cabinet. Nelson Mandela was made president of the 'new' South Africa.

In 1999, after five years of learning about democracy, the country voted in a more 'nor-

mal' election. Issues such as economics and competence were raised and debated.

There was some speculation that the ANC vote might drop with the retirement of Nelson Mandela. However, the ANC's vote increased to the point where the party came within one seat of the two-thirds majority that would allow it to alter the constitution. The National Party lost two-thirds of its seats, losing its official opposition status to the Democratic Party. Thabo Mbeki, who took over leadership of the ANC from Nelson Mandela, became president in the 1999 elections.

While Mbeki is viewed with far less affection by the ANC grass-roots than the beloved 'Madiba' (Mandela), he has proven himself a shrewd politician, maintaining his political pre-eminence by isolating or co-opting opposition parties. The 2004 national elections were won decisively by the ANC with 70% of the votes, with Mbeki at the helm, and today continues its dominance in daily political life.

Yet it has not been all clear sailing. In the early days of his presidency, Mbeki's effective denial of the AIDS crisis invited global criticism, and his conspicuous failure to condemn the forced reclamation of white-owned farms in neighbouring Zimbabwe unnerved both South African landowners and foreign investors.

South Africa Today

In the coming years – in addition to choosing a successor for Mbeki, who has announced that he will step down in 2009 – attention is likely to focus overwhelmingly on crime, economic inequality, overhauling the education system and, especially, AIDS. With an estimated 4.5 million South Africans affected – more than in any other country in the world – this scourge threatens to eclipse all of South Africa's other problems.

In many ways the real work of nation building is only now beginning. While the political violence that was threatening to engulf the country in the early 1990s has for the most part disappeared, racial and cultural divisions remain entrenched. Monuments, museums and other cultural heritage sites giving tribute to black South Africans and other previously excluded groups have been springing up across the country and filling a long vacant gap. Yet many have served to re-spark old tensions, and debate continues on all sides about which version of history is the 'real' one.

Perhaps the biggest attention grabber in South Africa's ongoing struggle to define itself as a nation has been Freedom Park – a multimillion dollar venture on the outskirts of Pretoria that is intended to give a sweeping overview of South African history. When finished, it will span the millennia from humankind's earliest beginnings up to the present, including a memorial to apartheid-era freedom fighters. The park, which has been lauded by President Mbeki as the country's most important national monument, is set directly opposite the Voortrekker Monument – for years an icon for most Afrikaners and a despised symbol of colonial-era injustices for many other South Africans.

What's the next step? While almost all South Africans agree that things are better than before, no-one has quite been able to agree on which way forward will best balance out the diversity that is the country's greatest asset, as well as its biggest challenge. There has been talk of building a road joining Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument. If this road ultimately comes to be seen by those on all sides as a symbol of a united path into the future, then it will have truly captured the emerging spirit of the new South Africa and the country will be well on its way to rebuilding itself as a 'rainbow nation'.

CULTURE

More than a decade has passed since South Africa's first democratic elections, and the country is still finding its way. While the streets pulsate with the same determination and optimism that fuelled the liberation struggle, the beat is tempered by the sobering social realities that are the legacy of apartheid's long years of oppression and bloodshed. Freedom also has brought with it a whole new set of challenges.

Unemployment, crime and HIV/AIDS – the leading cause of death in South Africa – are the top concerns of most South Africans today, and the nation is fast becoming a society divided by class rather than colour. The gap between rich and poor is vast – one of the highest in the world, according to World Bank statistics. Manicured suburbs rub shoulders with squalid townships where clean drinking water is a scarce commodity, and palatial residences overlook cramped tin-roofed shanties. Violent crime has stabilised at unacceptably high levels, and a generation that

saw almost daily brutality and uncertainty during its formative years is now coming of age. Although the formal racial divisions of apartheid have dissolved, shadows and old ways of interacting remain, and suspicions and distrust still run high.

Many middle-class and wealthy families live in heavily secured homes and spend their leisure time in equally fortified shopping centres. Guards patrol the walkways and shops to keep criminals at bay, there's still a lingering sense of fear and loss connected with the passing of the old regime, and conversations are peppered with gloomy predictions about the government and the future.

Life is very different for the millions of South Africans who are still living in poverty. Tiny matchbox houses are home to large extended families, clean drinking water remains a luxury in some areas, and health facilities are not uniformly available. Yet township life is vibrant and informal. People gather on street corners and in local bars known as *shebeens*. Weddings are big events, and frequently spill onto the streets with plenty of dancing. Unfortunately, funerals are becoming one of the most common gatherings in South Africa, and on weekends, cemeteries are routinely crowded with mourners.

While crime continues to grab headlines and undermine South Africa's reputation as a tourism destination, it's important to keep it in perspective. The slowly and often fitfully emerging new South Africa is a unique and refreshing place to visit, and one of the most inspiring and hope-filled places that you'll find anywhere on the continent.

PEOPLE

During the apartheid era, the government attempted to categorise everyone into one of four major groups – easily enough said, perhaps, but disastrous to implement. The classifications – as African (at various times also called 'native' and 'Bantu', and sometimes now also 'black'), coloured, Asian or white – were often arbitrary and highly contentious. They were used to regulate where and how people could live and work, and became the basis for institutionalised inequality and intolerance.

Today, these times are slowly fading into history, although now discrimination based on wealth is threatening to replace racial discrimination. Yet the apartheid-era classification terms continue to be used.

Most of the 'coloured' population lives in Northern and Western Cape Provinces. Cape Muslims are South Africans of long standing. Although many were brought to the early Cape Colony as slaves, others were political prisoners from the Dutch East Indies. Most South Africans of Indian descent live in KwaZulu-Natal. Limpopo, Mpumalanga and the Free State are the Afrikaner heartlands. People of British descent are concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal and Western and Eastern Cape Provinces.

The Homelands no longer have any political meaning and were never realistic indicators of the area's cultural diversity, however it's still useful to have some idea of where the Homelands were and who lived (and still live) in them. Zulus are the largest group (seven million), followed by the Xhosa (six million) and the various Northern Sotho peoples, most of whom are Tswana. The smallest group are the Venda (500,000).

ENVIRONMENT

South Africa spreads over 1,233,404 sq km – five times the size of the UK – at the tip of the African continent. On three sides, it's edged by a windswept and stunningly beautiful coastline, winding down the Atlantic seaboard in the west, and up into the warmer Indian Ocean waters to the east.

Much of the country consists of a vast plateau averaging 1500m in height, and known as the highveld. To the east is a narrow coastal plain (the lowveld), while to the northwest is the low-lying Kalahari basin. The dramatic Drakensberg Escarpment marks the point where the highveld plummets down towards the eastern lowlands.

South Africa is home to one of the most magnificent groupings of wildlife anywhere on the planet. It boasts the world's largest land mammal (the African elephant), as well as the second largest (white rhino) and the third largest (hippopotamus). It's also home to the tallest (giraffe), the fastest (cheetah) and the smallest (pygmy shrew). You probably have a better chance of seeing the Big Five – the black rhino, Cape buffalo, elephant, leopard and lion – in South Africa than anywhere else. There's also the opportunity to see a lesser-known 'Little Five' – the rhinoceros beetle, buffalo weaver, elephant shrew, leopard tortoise and ant lion – if you're looking for a challenge.

The best time for wildlife-watching is the cooler, dry winter (June to September) when foliage is less dense, and animals congregate at waterholes, making spotting easier. Summer (late November to March) is rainy and hot, with the animals more widely dispersed and often difficult to see. However, the landscape turns beautiful shades of green around this time, and birdlife is abundant.

South Africa hosts over 800 bird species, including the world's largest bird (the ostrich), its heaviest flying bird (Kori bustard), and vividly coloured sunbirds and flamingos. Bird-watching is good year-round, with spring (August to November) and summer the best.

South Africa is the world's third-most biologically diverse country. It's also one of Africa's most urbanised, with approximately 60% of the population living in towns and cities. Major challenges for the government include managing increasing urbanisation and population growth, while protecting the environment. The picture is complicated by a distorted rural-urban settlement pattern – a grim legacy of the apartheid era – with huge population concentrations in townships that generally lack adequate utilities and infrastructure.

Land degradation is one of the most serious problems, with about one-fourth of South Africa's land considered to be severely degraded. In former homeland areas, years of overgrazing and overcropping have resulted in massive soil depletion. This, plus poor overall conditions, is pushing people to the cities, increasing urban pressures even further.

Water is another issue. South Africa receives an average of only 500mm of rainfall annually, and droughts are common. To meet demand, all major South African rivers have been dammed or modified. While this has improved water supplies to many areas, it has also disrupted local ecosystems and caused increased silting.

National Parks & Reserves

South Africa has close to 600 national parks and reserves, collectively boasting spectacular scenery, impressive fauna and flora, excellent facilities and reasonable prices. The majority of the larger wildlife parks are under the jurisdiction of the **South African National (SAN) Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org), except for those in KwaZulu-Natal, which are run by **KZN**

Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com). Several other provinces also have conservation bodies that oversee smaller conservation areas within their boundaries. Other useful contacts include **Cape Nature Conservation** (☎ 021-426 0723; www.capenature.org.za) and the **Eastern Cape Tourism Board** (☎ 043-701 9600; www.ectb.co.za).

All South African national parks charge a daily entry (conservation) fee though amounts vary. One way to save is to consider purchasing a 'Wild Card' from SAN Parks. One version of the card gives foreign tourists 10 days entry into any one park for US\$107 (US\$188 per couple, US\$241 per family). If you're planning at least five days in Kruger National Park, it's worth buying.

In addition to its national parks, South Africa is also party to several transfrontier parks joining conservation areas across international borders, and private wildlife reserves also abound. However, in total, just under 7% of South African land has been given protected status. The government has started teaming up with private landowners to bring private conservation land under government protection, with the goal of ultimately increasing the total amount of conservation land to over 10%.

CAPE TOWN

☎ 021 / pop 3,140,600

The Mother City occupies one of the world's most stunning locations, with an iconic mountain slap-bang in its centre. As beautiful as the surrounding beaches and vineyards can be, as cosmopolitan and lively as its cultural scene, it's the rugged wilderness of Table Mountain, coated in a unique flora, that is the focus of attention. The city's multi-ethnic population is proof of South Africa's 'rainbow nation' and a visual record of the city's tumultuous, recorded history of over 350 years.

It's a place of extremes, with the wealth of Camps Bay and Constantia side by side with the poverty of townships such as Khayelitsha. Even in the townships and the deprived areas of the city – home to the vast majority of Capetonians – there are huge differences in lifestyle, and many great examples of civic pride and optimism to balance the shocking crime and HIV/AIDS statistics. Discovering the city's true diversity and spirit is all part of getting the most out of a visit here.

ORIENTATION

Cape Town's commercial centre – known as the City Bowl – lies to the north of Table Mountain and to the east of Signal Hill. The inner-city suburbs of Gardens, Oranjezicht and Tamboerskloof are all within walking distance of the City Bowl. Nearby you'll also find Signal Hill, Green Point and Sea Point, some of the other densely populated seaside suburbs.

Cape Town sprawls quite a distance to the northeast (this is where you'll find the beachside district of Bloubergstrand and the enormous Canal Walk Shopping Centre). To the south, skirting the eastern flank of the mountains and running down to Muizenberg at False Bay, are leafy and increasingly rich suburbs, including Observatory, Newlands and Constantia.

On the Atlantic Coast, exclusive Clifton and Camps Bay are accessible by coastal road from Sea Point or through Kloof Nek, the pass between Table Mountain and Lion's Head. Camps Bay is a 10-minute drive from the city centre and can easily be reached by public transport.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

The main mass-market bookshop and news-agent is CNA, with numerous branches around the city.

Clarke's Bookshop (☎ 423 5739; www.clarkesbooks.co.za; 211 Long St, City Bowl)

Exclusive Books Waterfront (☎ 419 0905; Victoria Wharf); Cavendish Sq Mall (Claremont)

Lifestyles on Kloof (50 Kloof St Gardens)

Internet Access

Cape Town is one of the most wired cities in Africa. Most hotels and hostels have internet facilities and you'll seldom have to hunt far for an internet café. Rates are pretty uniform, at US\$1.40 per hour. A handy central one, open 24 hours, is **Catwalk TV** (☎ 423 8999; www.catwalk.co.za; 16 Burg St, City Bowl).

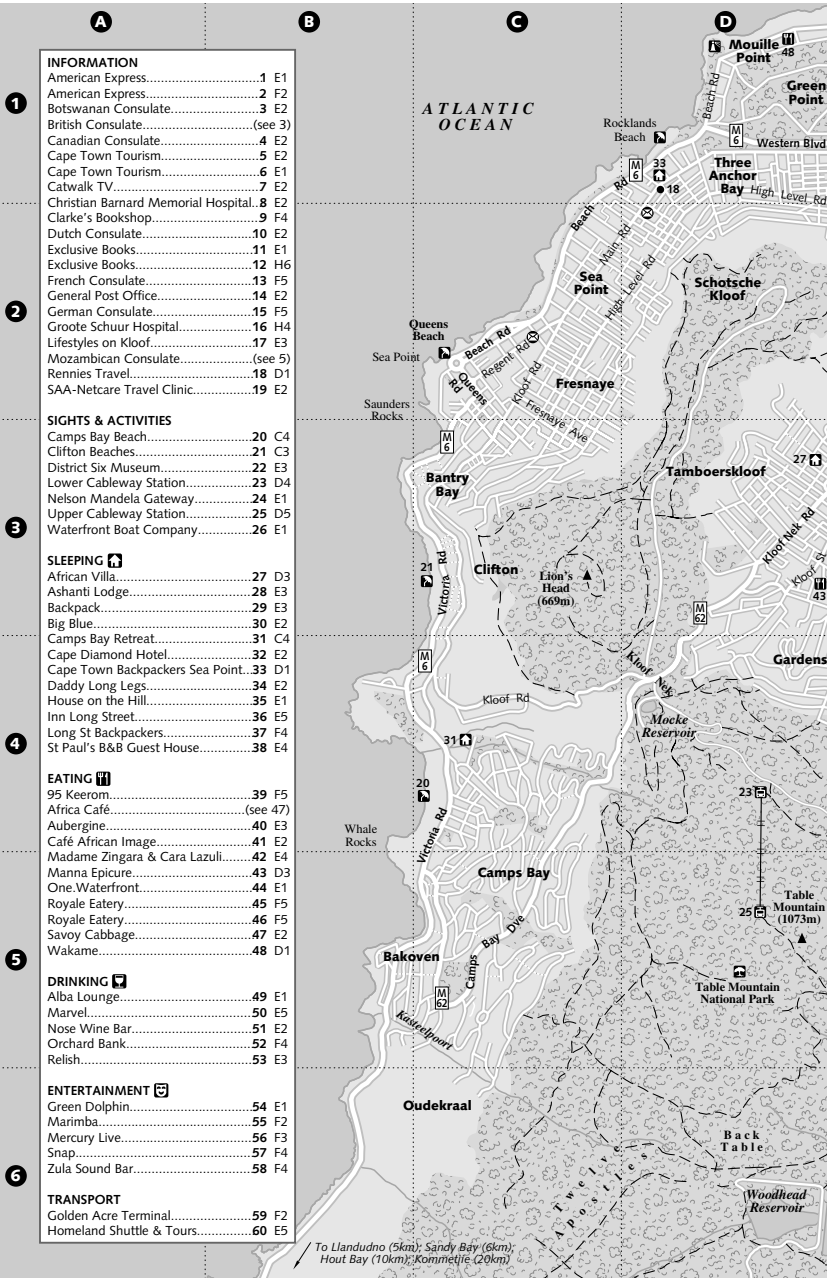
Medical Services

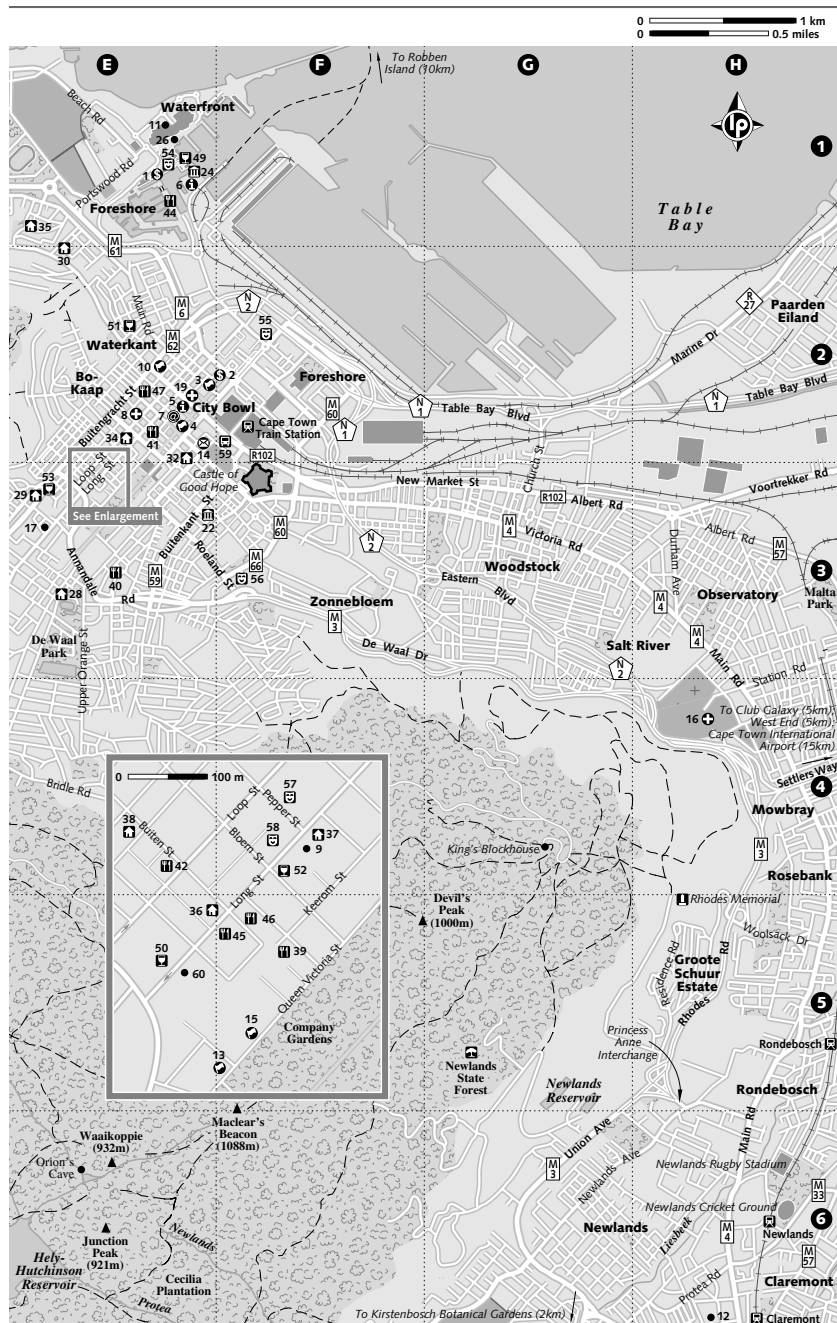
Christian Barnard Memorial Hospital (☎ 480 6111; www.netcare.co.za; 181 Longmarket St, City Bowl)

Groote Schuur Hospital (☎ 404 9111; capegateway.gov.za/gsh; Main Rd, Observatory)

SAA-Netcare Travel Clinic (☎ 419 3172; 11th fl, Picbal Arcade, 58 Strand St, City Bowl; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

CAPE TOWN





Money

Money can be changed at the airport, most commercial banks and at Cape Town Tourism (below). **Rennies Travel** (☎ 021-439 7529; www.renniestravel.co.za; 182 Main Rd), the local agent for Thomas Cook, has foreign-exchange offices.

There are ATMs all over town.

American Express City Bowl (☎ 425 7991; Thibault Sq); Waterfront (☎ 419 3917; V&A Hotel Mall, Waterfront)

Post

General post office (☎ 464 1700; Parliament St, City Bowl; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

The well-run **Cape Town Tourism** (www.tourism.capetown.co.za) City Centre (☎ 487 6800; cnr Castle & Burg Sts, City Bowl; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Oct-Mar, 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr-Sep); Waterfront (☎ 405 4500; Clock Tower Centre; ☎ 9am-9pm) can book accommodation, tours and rental cars. At the City Centre branch you can also get advice on **Cape Nature Conservation Parks** (☎ 426 0723) and the **National Parks & Reserves** (☎ 423 8005). There's also an internet café and a foreign-exchange booth.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Cape Town remains one of the most relaxed cities in Africa, which can instil a false sense of security. Paranoia is not required, but common sense is. There is tremendous poverty on the peninsula and the 'informal redistribution of wealth' is reasonably common. The townships on the Cape Flats have an appalling crime rate and unless you have a trustworthy guide or are on a tour they are not places for a casual stroll.

Swimming at any of the Cape beaches is potentially hazardous, especially for those inexperienced in surf. Check for warning signs about rips and rocks and only swim in patrolled areas.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Table Mountain National Park

Covering some three quarters of the peninsula, **Table Mountain National Park** (www.tmntp.co.za) stretches from flat-topped Table Mountain to Cape Point. For the vast majority of visitors the main attraction is the 1086m-high mountain itself, the top of which can easily be accessed by the **Cableway** (☎ 424 5148; www.tablemountain.net; adult one-way/return US\$8/16, child US\$4/6; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Feb-Nov, 8am-10pm Dec & Jan),

which runs every 10/20 minutes in high/low season.

The views from the revolving cable car and on the summit are phenomenal. The Cableway doesn't operate when it's dangerously windy, and there's little point going up if you are simply going to be wrapped in the cloud known as the 'tablecloth'. The best visibility and conditions are likely to be first thing in the morning or in the evening.

Hikers can take advantage of over 300 routes up and down, but bear in mind that the mountain is over 1000m high, conditions can become treacherous quickly and it's easy to get lost. Unprepared and foolhardy hikers die here every year. In 2005 Table Mountain National Park launched the first of its planned suite of three **Hoerikwaggo Trails** (www.hoerikwaggo.trails.co.za) designed to allow visitors, for the first time, to sleep on the mountain, and eventually to hike 80km or so from the City Bowl to Cape Point.

If you don't have your own transport, *rikkis* (see p1001) will drop you at the cable car from the city centre for US\$2; a nonshared taxi will cost around US\$7.

Robben Island & Nelson Mandela Gateway

Prisoners were incarcerated on **Robben Island** (☎ 413 4220; www.robben-island.org.za; adult/child US\$20/10; hourly ferries 9am-3pm year-round, plus sunset tour 5pm Dec & Jan) from the early days of the VOC right up until 1996. Now a museum and Unesco World Heritage Site, it is one of the most popular destinations in all of Cape Town.

While we heartily recommend going to Robben Island, a visit here is not without its drawbacks. Most likely you will have to endure crowds and being hustled around on a guided tour that at a maximum of two hours on the island (plus a 30 minute boat ride in both directions) is woefully short.

The standard tours include a walk through the old prison, as well as a 45-minute bus ride around the island with commentary on the various places of note. If you're lucky, you'll have about 10 minutes to wander around on your own. We recommend heading straight to the prison's A-section to view the remarkable and very moving exhibition *Cell Stories*. In each of 40 isolation cells is an artefact and story from a former political prisoner.

Tours depart from the **Nelson Mandela Gateway** (admission free; ☎ 9am-8.30pm) beside the Clock Tower at the Waterfront. Even if you don't plan a visit to the island, it's worth dropping by the museum here. Make bookings at the Nelson Mandela Gateway departure point or at Cape Town Tourism (see opposite) in the city. At holiday times all tours can be booked up for days.

City Bowl

The commercial heart of Cape Town, City Bowl is squeezed between Table Mountain, Signal Hill and the harbour. Immediately to the west is the Bo-Kaap and the Waterkant, and to the east Zonnebloem (once known as District Six).

DISTRICT SIX MUSEUM

If you see only one museum in Cape Town, make it the **District Six Museum** (☎ 466 7200; www.districtsix.co.za; 25A Buitenkant St; adult/child US\$2/1.30; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon, 9am-4pm Tue-Sat). This emotionally moving museum is as much for the people of the now-vanished District Six as it is about them. Displays include a floor map of District Six on which former residents have labelled where their demolished homes and features of their neighbourhood once stood.

You can also arrange a **walking tour** (☎ 466 7208; per person US\$7, 10 people minimum) of the old District Six.

LONG ST

Whether you come to browse the antique shops, second-hand bookshops, or the street-wear boutiques, or to party at the host of bars and clubs that crank up at night, a stroll along Long St is an essential element of a Cape Town visit. The most attractive section, lined with Victorian-era buildings with lovely wrought-iron balconies, runs from the junction at Buitensingel St north to around the Strand.

Green Point & Waterfront

Cape Town's prime Atlantic Coast suburbs start at the Waterfront, from where you'll depart for Robben Island (opposite). Near here you'll also find Green Point, which has lately seen the development of a shopping and dining complex.

VICTORIA & ALBERT WATERFRONT

Commonly referred to as just the **Waterfront** (www.waterfront.co.za) this tourist-orientated

precinct offers masses of shops, restaurants, bars, cinemas and other attractions, including cruises of the harbour (p998). Its success is partly due to the fact that it remains a working harbour still used by tugs, harbour vessels of various kinds, and fishing boats; there are always seals splashing around or lazing near the docks.

Atlantic Coast

Cape Town's Atlantic Coast is all about spectacular scenery and soft-sand beaches. Strong winds can be a downer, and although it's possible to shelter from the summer southeasterlies at some of the beaches, the water at them all – flowing straight from the Antarctic – is freezing.

CLIFTON BEACHES

Giant granite boulders split the four linked beaches at Clifton, which is accessible by steps from Victoria Rd. Almost always sheltered from the wind, these are Cape Town's top sunbathing spots. Local lore has it that No 1 and No 2 beaches are for models and confirmed narcissists, No 3 is the gay beach, and No 4 is for families.

CAMPS BAY BEACH

With the spectacular Twelve Apostles of Table Mountain as a backdrop, and soft white sand, Camps Bay is one of the city's most popular beaches. It's within a 15-minute drive of the city centre, so it can get crowded, particularly on weekends. The beach is often windy, and the water is decidedly on the cool side.

LLANDUDNO & SANDY BAY BEACHES

The surfing at Llandudno on the beach breaks (mostly rights) is best at high tide with a small swell and a southeasterly wind.

Nearby is Sandy Bay, Cape Town's nudist beach and gay stamping ground. It's a particularly beautiful stretch of sand and there's no pressure to take your clothes off if you don't want to.

Southern Suburbs

Heading west around Table Mountain and Devil's Peak will bring you to the Southern Suburbs, beginning with the bohemian, edgy areas of Woodstock and Observatory, and moving through to Rondebosch, Newlands and wealthy Constantia, home to South Africa's oldest vineyards and wine estates.

KIRSTENBOSCH BOTANICAL GARDENS

Location and unique flora combine to make Cape Town's **botanical gardens** (☎ 799 8783, Sat & Sun 761 4916; www.sanbi.org; Rhodes Dr, Newlands; adult/child US\$3.40/0.70; ☎ 8am-7pm Sep-Mar, 8am-6pm Apr-Aug) among the most beautiful in the world. The 36-hectare landscaped section seems to merge almost imperceptibly with the 492 hectares of *fynbos* (fine bush) vegetation cloaking the mountain slopes.

The gardens are at their best between mid-August and mid-October. The Sunday afternoon concerts are a Cape Town institution.

Cruises

If only to take in the panoramic view of Table Mountain from the water, a cruise into Table Bay should not be missed. **Waterfront Boat Company** (☎ 418 5806; www.waterfrontboats.co.za; Shop 7, Quay 5, Waterfront) offers a variety of cruises, including the highly recommended 1½-hour sunset cruises (US\$24).

Surfing

The Cape Peninsula has plenty of fantastic surfing possibilities, from gentle shore breaks ideal for beginners to 3m-plus monsters for experts only. In general, the best surf is along the Atlantic side. Water temperatures as low as 8°C mean a steamer wet suit and booties are required.

Kommetjie, pronounced 'Kommi-kee', is the Cape's surf mecca, offering an assortment of reefs that hold a very big swell.

SLEEPING

Remember, location is everything here. During school holidays from mid-December to the end of January, and at Easter, prices can double and many places are fully booked. Unless otherwise mentioned, rates also include breakfast. Parking is often an extra US\$3.40 to US\$5.50 per day.

City Bowl & Around

Long St Backpackers (☎ 423 0615; www.longstreetbackpackers.co.za; 209 Long St; dm/s/d US\$11/16/22) This one remains the best of the Long St backpackers. In a block of 14 small flats, with four beds and a bathroom in each, accommodation is arranged around a leafy, quiet courtyard.

St Paul's B&B Guest House (☎ 423 4420; stpaul@absamail.co.za; 182 Bree St; s/d US\$20/34; (P)) A quiet alternative to a backpackers. The simply furnished and spacious rooms have high ceilings,

and there's a vine-shaded courtyard where you can relax.

Inn Long Street (☎ 424 1660; innlongstreet@ataris.co.za; 230 Long St; dm US\$10, d with/without bathroom US\$39/32) There's a calm vibe at this backpackers despite it being in the thick of Long St. There's a wrap-around balcony that all rooms access, and a recent paint job and funky lights give it some style.

Cape Diamond Hotel (☎ 461 2519; www.capediamondhotel.co.za; cnr Longmarket & Parliament Sts; s/d from US\$50/71; (P) (Q)) A great-value new hotel that has kept features of its Art Deco building such as the wood-panelled floors. There's a rooftop Jacuzzi with a view to Table Mountain. Breakfast and parking are extra.

De Waterkant House (☎ 021-409 2500; www.dewaterkant.com; cnr Napier & Waterkant Sts, Waterkant; s/d US\$63/97; (Q) (Q)) A pleasant B&B in the heart of the gay village, with a plunge pool and rooms with glossy magazine-style furnishings. There's also a wide range of apartments in the area kicking off at single/double US\$90/100, as well as their popular budget-level 'crash pads' (single/double US\$38/54).

Daddy Long Legs (☎ 422 3074; www.daddylonglegs.co.za; 134 Long Street; r US\$100; (Q)) This boutique hotel/art installation is what you get when artists are given free rein to design the boudoirs of their dreams. There's nowhere to put your luggage – hey these are artists not hoteliers! – but a stay here is anything but boring.

Gardens & Around

Backpack (☎ 423 4530; www.backpackers.co.za; 74 New Church St, Tamboerskloof; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$12/34/41, s/d with bathroom US\$40/48; (P) (Q) (Q)) Cape Town's longest-running backpackers remains a relaxed and comfortable place with something for everyone, be it a lively time at their Thursday-night African drumming sessions or just chilling out in their chic ensuite rooms.

Ashanti Lodge (☎ 423 8721; www.ashanti.co.za; 11 Hof St, Gardens; camp site US\$7, dm/d with shared bathroom US\$12/34; guesthouse d US\$50; (P) (Q) (Q)) One of Cape Town's premier party hostels, with much of the action focused on its lively bar and deck overlooking Table Mountain.

African Villa (☎ 423 2164; www.capetowncity.co.za/villa; 19 Carstens St, Tamboerskloof; s/d from US\$86/108; (Q) (Q)) There's a sophisticated and colourful 'African-zen' look at this appealing guest-house, sheltering behind the façade of three 19th-century terrace houses.

Atlantic Coast

Big Blue (☎ 439 0807; www.bigbluebackpackers.hostel.com; 7 Vesperdene Rd, Green Point; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/30/36, d with bathroom US\$43; ☑ ☑) This brightly painted hostel remains a leading light of the Capetonian backpacking scene – come and enjoy its grand hallway, zen garden and friendly atmosphere.

Cape Town Backpackers Sea Point (☎ 426 0200; www.capetownbackpackers.com; 1 Rocklands Rd; dm/d US\$12/54; ☑ ☑) Easily the best budget option in Sea Point, steps away from the sea front. There's a six-bed dorm and three en-suite double rooms with giant rain showers, as well as a spacious communal kitchen.

House on the Hill (☎ 439 3122; www.houseonthehillct.co.za; 25 Leinster Rd, Green Point; d/tr US\$35/52, without bathroom US\$35/42) This self-catering house is a fine alternative to the bigger hostels. Book ahead for the five rooms pleasantly furnished in African style.

Camps Bay Retreat (☎ 437 0485; www.campsbayretreat.com; 7 Chilworth Rd, The Glen; s/d from US\$160/203; ☐ ☑ ☑ ☑) This is a splendid option with a choice of 16 rooms in either the main house or the contemporary Deck House, reached by a rope bridge over a ravine. There's also a couple of decent, self-catering rooms (US\$51 per person) next to the tennis court.

EATING City Bowl

Long St has many great places to eat, plus fantastic street life. Head to the Bo-Kaap to sample authentic Cape Malay dishes in unpretentious surroundings.

Café African Image (☎ 426 1857; 48 Church St; mains US\$4-6; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) Easily Cape Town's most colourful café, sporting groovy African-print cushions and tablecloths. Sample Tanzanian fish curry, African village stew or a range of healthy salads.

95 Keerom (☎ 422 0765; 95 Keerom St; mains US\$7-13; ☎ 12.30-2pm Mon-Fri, 7pm-11pm Mon-Sat) Bookings are essential for this super-stylish Italian restaurant round the back of Rhodes House. Given the quality of food the prices are very reasonable, particularly for the handmade pastas.

Royale Eatery (☎ 422 4536; 279 Long St; mains US\$8; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) Our favourite gourmet-burger bar keeps growing, opening a cute satellite branch around the corner on Vredenburg Lane. For something different try the Big Bird ostrich burger.

Madame Zingara & Cara Lazuli (☎ 426 2458; 192 Loop St; mains US\$9; ☎ 7-11pm Mon-Sat) Every night is party night at this bohemian, crowd-pleasing restaurant. Unless you're a committed carnivore we'd advise against its infamous whopper stack of beef fillets doused in chilli-chocolate sauce. Magic tricks, tarot-card readings, belly dancing and dressing up in silly hats is all part of the fun.

Savoy Cabbage (☎ 424 2626; 101 Hout St; mains US\$9.50-12) The standard bearer of the city's contemporary dining scene remains a great place for inventive cooking, including the chance to try local game meats such as zebra and wildebeest.

Africa Café (☎ 422 0221; www.africacafe.co.za; 108 Shortmarket St; set banquet US\$20; ☎ 6.30pm-11pm) A Cape Town institution, the Africa Café is best known for its set feast comprising some 15 dishes from across the continent. The décor and friendly staff who dance and sing through the restaurant are equally fantastic.

Gardens & Around

Kloof St offers the best dining selection in Gardens.

Aubergine (☎ 465 4129; www.aubergine.co.za; 39 Barnet St, Gardens; mains US\$9-17; ☎ 7pm-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Thu) It's all about the world-class food here. Innovative dishes, such as warthog confit or salmon-trout ice cream are on the à la carte menu.

Manna Epicure (☎ 426 2413; 151 Kloof St, Tamboerskloof; ☎ 8am-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) Join the style set for deliciously simple breakfast or lunch at this trendy café, or come for late-afternoon cocktails and tapas on their street-front veranda.

Green Point & Waterfront

The Waterfront's plethora of restaurants and cafés have nice ocean views although it's essentially a giant tourist trap. Better value and a less touristy dining experience are available a short walk away in Green Point and Mouille Point.

Wakame (☎ 433 2377; www.wakame.co.za; cnr of Beach Rd & Surrey Place, Mouille Point; mains US\$9.50; ☎ noon-10pm) Tucking into Wakame's salt-and-pepper squid or sushi platter, while gazing at the glorious coastal view, is a wonderful way to pass an afternoon.

One Waterfront (☎ 418 0520; Cape Grace Hotel, West Quay, Waterfront; mains US\$9.50-13) It's the daring combinations of ingredients that catch the

eye on the menu, though some of the best dishes are those that keep it simple, such as the lovely fishcakes.

DRINKING

Marvel (☎ 426 5880; 236 Long St, City Bowl; ☹ 1pm–4am Mon–Sat) Stuffed as a sardine can, Marvel is a fantastic bar where cool kids of all colours rub shoulders (not to mention practically everything else).

Orchard Bank (www.orchardbank.co.za; 229B Long St, City Bowl) One of Long St's more interesting and laid-back venues, with a roster of events including stand-up comedy.

Nose Wine Bar (☎ 425 2200; www.thenose.co.za; Cape Quarter, Dixon St, Waterkant) First-class wine bar where you can sip your way around 38 of the Cape's best wines. It also serves excellent food and runs wine-tasting courses.

Relish (☎ 422 3584; 70 New Church St, Tamboerskloof; ☹ noon–2am Mon–Fri, 5pm–2am Sat & Sun) You'll get panoramic views of Table Mountain and Lion's Head from this trendy place with a wide outdoor deck. The food is good and during happy hour (6pm to 7pm) cocktails are only US\$1.60.

Alba Lounge (☎ 425 3385; 1st fl, Hildegarde's, Pierhead, Waterfront) Easily the most stylish place for cocktails at the Waterfront. The view across the harbour is seductive, the drinks inventive and there's a roaring fire in winter.

ENTERTAINMENT

Live Music

Green Dolphin (☎ 421 7471; www.greendolphin.co.za; Waterfront; cover US\$3.40) There's a consistently good line-up of artists at this upmarket jazz venue and restaurant (serving decent food).

Marimba (☎ 418 3366; www.marimbasa.com; Cape Town Convention Centre, City Bowl; diners US\$2.80, nondiners US\$4) Yes, they do have a marimba band playing occasionally at this slick Afro-chic venue, as well as a packed schedule of other jazz artists. The food is good and the music sets kick off at 8pm.

West End (☎ 637 9132; Cine 400 Bldg, College Rd, Ryelands Estate, Athlone; cover US\$4; ☹ 8pm–late Fri & Sat) Mainstream jazz is the name of the game here. This is one of Cape Town's top venues, attracting a well-heeled clientele and top performers.

Mercury Live (☎ 465 2106; www.mercuryl.co.za; 43 De Villiers St, Zonnebloem; cover US\$2.80–5.50) Cape Town's premier rock venue plays host to top South African bands and overseas visitors. If you

don't like the band, there's always the DJ-bar Mercury Lounge below and the Shack bar next door.

Nightclubs

The major nightclubs are concentrated in the City Bowl around Long St and in the Waterkant. The big nights are Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

Club Galaxy (☎ 637 9132; College Rd, Ryelands Estate, Athlone; cover US\$4) Long-time Cape Flats dance venue where you can get down to R&B, hip-hop and live bands with a black and coloured crowd. The equally legendary West End jazz venue is next door.

Snap (☎ 083-940 3983; 6 Pepper St, City Bowl; cover US\$2.80) The Cape Flats comes to the city at this urban African club with a welcoming, predominantly black audience. Dance to music from across Africa.

Zula Sound Bar (☎ 424 2442; 194 Long St, City Bowl; cover US\$2.80) Hosts an interesting range of events including live bands, DJs and even open-mic poetry sessions. Their long balcony is the place to watch Long St go by.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Cape Town International Airport (☎ 937 1200; www.airports.co.za) is 20km east of the city centre, approximately 20 minutes' drive depending on traffic.

Apart from **South African Airways** (SAA; ☎ 0860 359 722; www.flysaa.com) there are two budget airlines operating out of Cape Town: **Kulula.com** (☎ 0861 585 852; www.kulula.com) and **1time** (☎ 0861 345 345; www.1time.co.za). All three fly to the major South African cities. For a list of international airlines with offices serving Cape Town see p1034.

Greyhound, Intercape Mainliner, SA Roadlink and Translux bus lines operate out of Cape Town. Their booking offices and main arrival and departure points are at the Meriman Sq end of Cape Town train station (City Bowl).

All trains leave from the main Cape Town train station. It can take a long time to get to the front of the queue at the **booking office** (☎ 449 4596; ☹ 7.30am–4.55pm Mon–Fri, 7.30–10.30am Sat).

GETTING AROUND

Both **Backpacker Bus** (☎ 447 4991, 82-119 9185; www.backpackerbus.co.za) and **Homeland Shuttle & Tours** (☎ 426 0294, 083-265 6661; www.homeland.co.za; 305 Long St, City Bowl) pick up from accommodation in

the city and offer airport transfers for US\$12 per person. Expect to pay around US\$27 for a nonshared taxi.

For local bus services, the main station is the **Golden Acre Terminal** (Grand Parade, City Bowl). From here **Golden Arrow** (☎ 0800 656 463; www.gabs.co.za) buses run, with most services stopping early in the evening. Buses are most useful for getting along the Atlantic Coast from the city centre to Hout Bay. Minibus taxis cover most of the city with an informal network of routes, and are a cheap way of getting around.

A cross between a taxi and a shared taxi are the tiny minivans or **rikkis** (☎ 418 6713; www.rikkis.co.za; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat). They can be booked or hailed on the street and travel within a 5km radius of the city centre. A trip from the main train station to Camps Bay is US\$2.

It's worth considering taking a nonshared taxi late at night or if you're in a group. Rates are about US\$1.40 per km. There's a taxi rank at the Adderley St end of the Grand Parade in the city.

Metro commuter trains are a handy way to get around, although there are few (or no) trains after 6pm Monday to Friday and after noon on Saturday. For information contact **Cape Metro Rail** (☎ 0800 656 463; www.capemetrorail.co.za).

AROUND CAPE TOWN

WINELANDS

The Boland, stretching inland and upwards from Cape Town, isn't the only wine-growing region in South Africa, but it's certainly the most famous. It's name means 'Upland', a reference to the dramatic mountain ranges that shoot up to over 1500m, on whose fertile slopes the vineyards form a patchwork. Lively student-town Stellenbosch offers the most activities.

Stellenbosch

☎ 021 / pop 220,000

South Africa's second-oldest European settlement, established on the banks of the Eerste River in 1679, Stellenbosch wears many faces. At times it's a rowdy joint for Stellenbosch University students, and at others it's a stately monument to colonial architectural splendour. But most times it's just plain busy, as Capetonians, wine farm workers and tourists

descend on its interesting museums, buzzing markets, quality hotels and varied eating and nightlife options.

There are too many good wineries in the Stellenbosch area to list all of them, so it's sometimes best to drive around and stop on a whim. We do, however, recommend a visit to **Blaauwklippen** (☎ 880 0133; www.blaauwklippen.com; tastings US\$3.40; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-4pm Sun), a rustic 300-year-old estate. **Easy Rider Wine Tours** (☎ 886 4651; 12 Market St) is a long-established company offering good value for a full-day trip at US\$34, including lunch and all wine tastings.

Lively and welcoming **Stumble Inn** (☎ 887 4049; 12 Market St; camp sites per person US\$5.50, dm US\$8, d without bathroom US\$20; ☎ ☎) is split over two old houses, one with a pool and the other with a pleasant garden. They also run Easy Rider Wine Tours (above). **De Oude Meul** (☎ 887 7085; www.deoudemeul.snowball.co.za; 10A Mill St; s/d incl breakfast US\$50/74; ☎ ☎), above an antique shop in the centre of town, is very good and reasonable for the price. The **Wild Mushroom** (☎ 886 9880; 15 Rynveld St; s/d incl breakfast US\$60/105; ☎ ☎) is slap bang in the middle of Stellenbosch's trendy restaurant zone and offers plush accommodation.

De Volkskombuis (☎ 887 2121; Aan de Wagenweg; mains US\$10; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) is a local favourite specialising in traditional Cape Malay cuisine and featuring a terrace with fine mountain views. **Moyo** (☎ 119 1100; Spier Estate, Vlothenburg; buffet US\$24; ☎ ☎) is a lot of fun, with roving musicians and dancers, and alfresco dining in tents and up in the trees in the middle of the Spier wine estate.

Long-distance bus services charge high prices for the short sector to Cape Town and do not take bookings. You're better off using **Backpacker Bus** (☎ 447 4991; www.backpackerbus.co.za), which charges US\$19 to US\$30 one-way and will pick you up from where you are staying.

Metro trains run the 46km between Cape Town and Stellenbosch (1st/economy class US\$1.60/\$.90, about one hour).

THE GARDEN ROUTE

The Garden Route is perhaps the most internationally renowned South African destination after Cape Town and the Kruger National Park, and with good reason. Within a few hundred kilometres, the range of topography, vegetation, wildlife and outdoor activity

is breathtaking. Roughly encompassing the coastline from Mossel Bay in the west to just beyond Plettenberg Bay in the east, it caters to all kinds of travellers and all manner of budgets.

You can hike in old-growth forests, bike through wildlife reserves, commune with monkeys, chill-out on superb white beaches and canoe in lagoons. The towns most commonly used as bases are Knysna and Plettenberg Bay.

Places are described west to east. Most travellers visit Oudtshoorn while traversing the Garden Route so, although this town is technically in the little Karoo, we've included it in this section.

ODUTSHOORN

☎ 044 / pop 85,000

That it bills itself as the ostrich capital of the world is no overstatement. These birds have been bred hereabouts since the 1870s, and at the turn of the 20th century fortunes were made from the fashion for ostrich feathers. Oudtshoorn boomed, and the so-called 'feather barons' built the grand houses that lend the town its distinct atmosphere today.

The town still turns a pretty penny from breeding the birds for meat and leather, and the ostriches also pay their way with tourists – you can buy ostrich eggs, feathers and *biltong* all over town – but more importantly Oudtshoorn is a great base for exploring the different environments of the Garden Route and the Karoo; the latter is a desolate and harsh landscape dotted with eccentric little towns.

Sights & Activities

On Grant McIlrath's (the so-called 'Meerkat Man of Oudtshoorn') **meerkat experience** (☎ 272 3077; www.meerkatmagic.com; minimum donation US\$40; ☼ sunset & sunrise), at a natural burrow a few kilometres west of town, you will get to see up close how these curious, highly intelligent creatures communicate and live.

If you're going to one of the ostrich farms north of town or to the Cango Caves, carry on driving and take the **Swartberg Pass** all the way to Prince Albert, then return to Oudtshoorn via the **Meiringspoort Pass**. Both are engineering masterpieces, and halfway down the latter is a waterfall and small visitor centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Oasis Shanti (☎ 279 1163; oasis@mailbox.co.za; 3 Church St; camp site per person US\$4.70, dm US\$8, d without bathroom from US\$24; ☎) Friendly and well run, this recently refurbished hostel is in a large house with a spacious barbecue and swimming-pool area, and shady camping spots.

Backpackers Paradise (☎ 272 3436; www.backpackersparadise.hostel.com; 148 Baron van Rheede St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$9, r from US\$24, d US\$34; ☎) In a large old house, this excellent hostel has a separate dorm-bed annexe and free ostrich-egg breakfasts. There's an adventure centre attached.

Oakdene Guesthouse (☎ 272 3018; www.oakdene.co.za; 99 Baron van Rheede St; s/d US\$53/84; ☎) Elegant cottage furniture, wooden floors, ostrich eggs, and high-quality linens make each room special. The lush gardens and excellent pool add to the charm.

Jemima's (☎ 272 0808; 94 Baron van Rheede St; mains from US\$7; ☎ dinner Mon-Sun, dinner Fri) Jemima's delights both the palate and the eyes, but it's the food that ultimately takes centre stage. The Cape Malay dishes are legendary.

De Fijne Keuken (☎ 272 6403; 114 Baron van Rheede St; mains US\$7-9.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's loads of outdoor seating at this funky restaurant and the varied menu includes ostrich cooked every way imaginable, and a large selection of pastas.

Getting There & Around

Intercape (☎ 0861-287 287; www.intercape.co.za) has a service to Jo'burg (US\$43, 14½ hours, daily). Otherwise you can take a **Translux bus** (☎ 021-449 3333; www.translux.co.za) to Mossel Bay (US\$7, one hour, daily) and from there you can get to multiple destinations (see opposite).

The Baz Bus stops at George, from where you can arrange a transfer to Oudtshoorn with Backpackers' Paradise (US\$4.70).

Every Saturday the Southern Cross train leaves for Cape Town at 5pm.

KNYSA

☎ 044 / pop 54,000

Perched on the edge of a serene lagoon and surrounded by forests, Knysna's (pronounced 'ny-znah') sylvan setting, gay-friendly vibe, good places to stay, eat and drink, and wide range of activities, mean it has plenty going for it. But if you're after something quiet and undeveloped, you should look elsewhere, particularly in high season, when the number of visitors swells.

Although regulated by **SAN Parks** (☎ 382 2095; www.sanparks.org; Long St, Thesen's Island), Knysna Lagoon, covering 13 sq km, is not a national park or wilderness area. Much is still privately owned, and the lagoon is used by industry and for recreation. The best way to appreciate the lagoon is to take a cruise on the **MV John Benn** (☎ 382 1697; www.featherbed.co.za; Waterfront; adult/child US\$11/4.70, with lunch US\$34/15; ☎ departs 10am, 11.30am & 12.30pm) or ask at the **Heads Adventure Centre** (☎ 384 0831; theHeads) for water activities. Snorkelling equipment can be rented for US\$12.

You'll find mainly dorm beds at **Knysna Backpackers** (☎ 382 2554; knybpack@netactive.co.za; 42 Queen St; dm US\$9.50, d without bathroom from US\$24), a large and relaxing Victorian house on the hill a few blocks up from the main street. **Highfield Backpackers** (☎ 382 6266; www.highfieldbackpackers.co.za; 2 Graham St; dm US\$9.50, d with/without bathroom from US\$34/27) feels more like a B&B and has attractive doubles. The most imaginatively designed guesthouse in Knysna is **Inyathi Guest Lodges** (☎ 382 7768; www.inyathi-sa.com; 52 Main St; s/d from US\$59/77) with accommodation in uniquely decorated timber lodges – some with Victorian bathtubs, others with stained-glass windows.

Knysna Oyster Company (☎ 382 6941; www.mbendi.co.za/koyster; Thesen's Island; mains from US\$5.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) grows its own oysters out in the lagoon; you can take a tour of the processing plant and have an oyster tasting at its restaurant afterwards. Despite its shopping-centre setting, **De Oude Fabriek** (☎ 382 5723; cnr Main & Gray Sts; mains US\$6-11; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a convivial spot to sample game meat, crocodile and Knysna oysters.

PLETTENBERG BAY

☎ 044 / pop 34,000

Plettenberg Bay, or 'Plett' as it's more commonly known, is a resort town through and through, with mountains, white sand and crystal-blue water making it one of the country's top local tourist spots. As a result, things can get very busy and somewhat overpriced, but the town retains a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and does have good-value hostels.

Those wanting to try surfing can take a lesson through the **International Surf School** (☎ 082-636 8431; for 3½hr US\$40), which caters to all levels of surfers. It doesn't have an office, so just phone.

Our choice for best budget option in town is the spotless and spacious **Nothando Backpackers Hostel** (☎ 533 0220; info@nothando.co.za; 5 Wilder St;

dm US\$10, d with/without bathroom US\$31/28). There's a happening bar area with satellite TV, yet you can still find peace and quiet in the large grounds. It's just a hop to the beach at **Abalone Beach House** (☎ 535 9602; beachhouse@global.co.za; 50 Ifafi Properties, Keurboomstrand; d without bathroom US\$24; ☎). Surf and boogie boards can be hired (US\$1.40). It's about 6km east of Plett.

Cornuti Al Mare (☎ 533 1277; 1 Perestrella St; mains US\$7-9.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a stylishly decked-out Italian oyster bar with hearty pizzas and refreshing cocktails served on a sun terrace.

TSITSIKAMMA COASTAL NATIONAL PARK

This **park** (adult/child US\$11/6) protects 82km of coast between Plettenberg Bay and Humansdorp, including the area 5km out to sea. Located at the foot of the Tsitsikamma Range and cut by rivers that have carved deep ravines into the ancient forests, it's a spectacular area to walk through. Several short day walks give you a taste of the coastline.

The main information centre for the national park is Storms River Mouth Rest Camp, 68km from Plettenberg Bay and 8km from the N2. The park gate is 6km from the N2. It's 2km from the gate to the main camp, which is open 24 hours.

The 42km **Otter Trail** (per person US\$70) is one of the most acclaimed hikes in South Africa, hugging the coastline from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley. The walk, which lasts five days and four nights, involves fording a number of rivers, and gives access to some superb stretches of coast. Book the trail through **SAN Parks** (☎ 012-426 5111). The trail is usually booked up one year ahead. There are often cancellations, however, so it's always worth trying.

Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; camp site/forest hut/family cottages US\$19/31/99) offers forest huts, chalets, cottages and 'oceanettes'; all except the forest huts are equipped with kitchens, bedding and bathrooms. Another good option is **Tsitsikamma Falls Adventure Park** (☎ 280 3770; www.tsitsikamma.adventure.co.za; Witelsbos; s/d incl breakfast from US\$24/49), a family-run guesthouse about halfway between Nature's Valley and Jeffrey's Bay, and near a beautiful waterfall.

Greyhound, Intercape and Translux buses run along the N2 between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, from where it's an 8km walk to Storms River Mouth.

STORM'S RIVER

☎ 042

Storms River is an odd little hamlet with tree-shaded lanes, a few places to stay and an outdoor centre. From the N2 the Storms River signpost points to this village that lies outside the national park. The turn-off is 4km east of the turn-off to the national park, and is signed as Storms River Mouth (or 'Storms-riviermond' in Afrikaans).

Most activities on offer are organised by **Storms River Adventures** (☎ 281 1836; www.stormsriver.com; Darnell St, Storms River). These include a tree-canopy slide (US\$53) and an overnight bush experience (all equipment provided) at the Konga Bush Eco-Camp (US\$47). The world's highest bungee jump (216m) is at the **Bloukrans River Bridge** (☎ 281 1458; www.faceadrenalin.com; per jump US\$78), 21km west of Storms River.

If you're after a post-bungee rest try **Tube 'n' Axe** (☎ 281 1757; tube-n-axe@telkomsa.net; cnr Darnell & Saffron Sts; camp site US\$7, dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/27; ☑). Another option is **Ploughman's Rest** (☎ 281 1726; www.ploughmansrest.co.za; 31 Formosa St; s/d incl breakfast US\$28/53), a friendly B&B.

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops at Storms River, but there's no other public transport to the village.

SUNSHINE COAST

This stretch of shoreline between the Garden Route and the Wild Coast is known as the Sunshine Coast, and is best known for the surfing mecca of Jeffrey's Bay. We have also included the mystical mountain hamlet of Hogsback in this section because, although it's not actually on the coastline, it's often visited from East London.

JEFFREY'S BAY

☎ 042 / pop 25,000

A far cry from its origins as a sleepy seaside town frequented by young families, 'J-Bay' takes its place as one of the world's top surfing destinations. Boardies from all around the planet flock here to ride waves such as the famous Supertubes, once described as 'the most perfect wave in the world'. June to September are the best months for experienced surfers, but novices can learn year-round. Development is raging at a furious pace, with shopping in the myriad clothing stores almost

overtaking surfing as the main leisure activity, but so far the local board-waxing vibe has been retained.

The most popular backpackers in town is **Island Vibe** (☎ 293 1625; ivibe@lantic.net; 10 Dageraad St; camp site/dm/d US\$5.50/9.50/24), a couple of kilometres south of the city centre. The new beautifully decorated beach house has double rooms (US\$34) only and a separate kitchen. **Lazee Bay** (☎ 296 2012; lazeebay@worldonline.co.za; 25 Mimosa St; d incl breakfast US\$40; ☑), one of J-Bay's best guesthouses, up on a hill above Da Gama Rd, is memorable for its funky décor and great sea views, while **Supertubes Guesthouse** (☎ 293 2957; supertubes@agnet.co.za; 10/1.60 Pepper St; s/d incl breakfast US\$47/67, s/d luxury rooms US\$70/108; ☑ ☑) is right in the prime surfing spot and provides luxurious accommodation.

Die Walskipper (☎ 082-110 9478; Marina Martinique; seafood platters US\$16; ☑ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun), specialising in seafood, and crocodile and ostrich steaks, is just metres from the lapping sea at the Marina Martinique beach. **Tapas Lapa Seaside** (☎ 292 0119; Marina Martinique; mains US\$7-11; ☑ dinner) is just across the car park from the seashore, so the sand on the floor has to be shovelled in! Meals feature decent seafood, and there's a bar next door.

The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) stops daily at hostels in both directions. A fare from Jeffrey's Bay to Cape Town costs US\$51 and takes 12 hours. The **Sunshine Express** (☎ 293 2221) runs door-to-door between Port Elizabeth and Jeffrey's Bay (US\$1.40, one hour).

PORT ELIZABETH

☎ 041 / pop 1.5 million

Port Elizabeth, the Eastern Cape's biggest town and its major transport hub, is known by South Africans as 'PE' and by locals as the 'friendly city', though many consider it no more than a charmless, convenient place to stop for a rest and stock up on supplies before moving onward. It does, however, offer some of the Eastern Cape's best bathing and surfing beaches.

Lungile Backpackers (☎ 582 2042; lungile@netactive.co.za; 12 La Roche Dr, Humewood; camp site/dm/tw/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9/22/24; ☑ ☑), Port Elizabeth's most popular backpackers, is contained in an airy Swiss-style home minutes from the beachfront. The **Bay Hotel** (☎ 585 1558; info@bayberry.co.za; 7 Lutman St; s/d incl breakfast US\$34/51) feels more like a B&B than a hotel, with reasonable rates for elegant rooms, and

the family-run **Chapman Hotel** (☎ 584 0678; www.chapman.co.za; 1 Lady Bea Cres, Brookes Hill, Summerstrand; s/d incl breakfast US\$62/74; 🍷 🍷 🍷) overlooking the sea south of the city centre, is an upmarket choice with great views.

Most of Port Elizabeth's best cafés are in the Boardwalk Casino Complex in Summerstrand, at the far end of Beach Rd. The atmosphere is a bit artificial, but here you can at least sip a cappuccino in peace away from the plastic fast-food joints of the beachfront, though **Mauro's** (☎ 582 2700; MacArthur Leisure Centre, Beach Rd; mains US\$7-11; 🍷 🍷 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun), a California-style trendy bistro is something of an anomaly.

There are daily flights to Jo'burg, Durban and Cape Town on a number of airlines.

Port Elizabeth has regular bus connections to the major South African cities including Cape Town (US\$24, 12 hours), Durban (US\$38, 15 hours) and East London (US\$17, five hours). The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) runs from Port Elizabeth to Durban; it's US\$97 for a one-way, hop-on, hop-off ticket. **J-Bay Sunshine Express** (☎ 293 2221) minibus taxis run between Jeffrey's Bay, Port Elizabeth and other coastal areas.

HOGSBACK

☎ 045 / pop 1500

Located, improbably, 1300m up in the beautiful Amathole Mountains, about 100km north-west of Bhisho, the small village of Hogsback has enjoyed a recent renaissance. Its English climate (four distinctive seasons), organic food, and mind-boggling views of mountains and forested valleys in all directions, make it an eco-destination *par excellence*.

There are some great walks, bike rides and drives in the area. Be prepared for rain at any time, and in winter for temperatures that can drop to -1°C.

Away with the Fairies (☎ 962 1031; hogsback1@iafrica.com; Hydrangea Lane; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9.50/23; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a majestic little getaway with a superb view of Hogsback Ridge.

Another option is the **Edge** (☎ 962 1159; info@theedge_hogsback.co.za; Bluff End; self-catering cottages from US\$47; 🍷 🍷 🍷), a collection of 12 stunningly decorated cottages strung out along the mountain's edge.

The easiest way to get to Hogsback without a car is by shuttle bus from the Sugarshack Backpackers (right) in East London or Buccaneer's Backpackers (p1006) in Cintsas.

EAST LONDON

☎ 043 / pop 980,000

The country's only river port, with a good surf beach and a spectacular bay that curves round to huge sand hills, East London is one of the few cities in the world that is equally populous and dour. Unless you're a surfer (or a shark), there isn't really much to keep you here, though it can be a good base for moving on to holiday spots along the Sunshine or Wild Coast.

With the beach just metres away, the surf's always up at lively **Sugarshack Backpackers** (☎ 722 8240; www.sugarshack.co.za; Eastern Esplanade, Eastern Beach; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$4.70/9/22; 🍷 🍷 🍷). Activities on offer include cliff-jumping (US\$3.40) and surf lessons (US\$10). **Niki Nana Backpackers** (☎ 722 8509; www.nikinana.co.za; 4 Hillview Rd; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$6/9/22; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a small but comfortable backpackers with a large swimming pool. **White House** (☎ 740 0344; www.thewhitehousebandb.co.za; 10 Whitthaus St, Gonubie; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/53; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a stylish guesthouse with glass windows for panoramic views of cliffs and sea.

The elegant **Strandloper Café** (☎ 735 4570; 95 Old Transkei Rd; mains US\$8-12; 🍷 🍷 dinner Mon-Sat) specialises in seafood. A perfect cross-section of East London life frequents **Smokey Swallows** (☎ 727 1349; Devereux Ave; mains US\$8-13; 🍷 🍷 lunch & dinner), which has frequent live jazz acts.

South African Airways flies from East London daily to Port Elizabeth (US\$103), Durban (around US\$150) and Cape Town (around US\$250).

Translux, Greyhound and SA Connection have daily buses to Port Elizabeth (US\$25, four hours), Durban (US\$26, 10 hours), Cape Town (US\$40, 15 hours) and Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$38, 14 hours). The **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323) runs through here on its way between Port Elizabeth and Durban.

TRANSKEI AND THE WILD COAST

With its green rolling hills, rugged cliffs plunging into the sea, remote coves sheltering sandy beaches, and a history of shipwrecks and stranded sailors, the aptly named Wild Coast is a place for adventure and intrigue. Stretching for 350km from East London to Port Edward, its coast is dotted with tiny

Xhosa settlements and the occasional holiday resort or backpacker hostel.

You may hear some people refer to the area as the 'Transkei', which was the name of the apartheid-era homeland that once covered this part of the country. The name 'Transkei', however, stills bears the stigma of an area once feared for its crime rate and its extreme poverty, so locals prefer the term Wild Coast.

CINTSA (CHINTSA)

☎ 043 / pop 2000

Heading up the N2, the sea spray starts to hit your face at an unspoilt stretch of white-sand beach called Cintsa, 38km from East London. Cintsa comprises two small, pretty villages, Cintsa East and Cintsa West. It's definitely the best place on this part of the coast to hang out for a few days (or weeks).

Something of a rarity, **Buccaneer's Backpackers** (☎ 734 3012, 734 3749; www.cintsa.com; Cintsa West; camp site/dm/d US\$6/10/24; ☐ ☐) or 'Bucks' is a sort of all-inclusive holiday resort for backpackers offering every imaginable outdoor activity through the excellent African Heartland Tours based here. The dorm rooms are comfortable, and safari tents (US\$20) and cottages (US\$38) are also available.

COFFEE BAY

☎ 047 / pop 600

These days, this once-remote hamlet is a backpacker's mecca, with two busy hostels and a couple of more upmarket hotels in the village centre. Coffee Bay itself is a fairly scruffy place, but the surrounding scenery is dramatic, with a beautiful kilometre-long beach set in front of towering cliffs.

The more hippified of the two backpackers in Coffee Bay is **Bomvu Paradise** (☎ 575 2073; www.bomvubackpackers.com; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$4/9/22), which offers yoga instruction, organic meals and drum sessions. The dorms and rooms are comfortable and funky, and the staff efficient and friendly. **Coffee Shack** (☎ 575 2048; www.coffeeshack.co.za; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$5.50/9.50/27; ☐), just across the road from Bomvu, has a definite party vibe. **Ocean View Hotel** (☎ 575 2005; www.oceanview.co.za; s/d with half board and sea views US\$55/81, without sea views US\$47/70; ☐ ☐ ☐) has good-quality, bungalow-style rooms, with a deck overlooking the ocean.

A minibus taxi from Mthatha to Coffee Bay costs US\$3 and takes one hour. The backpacker hostels meet the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-

439 2323) at the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mthatha.

Around Coffee Bay

There are a number of hotels and resorts along the stretch of coast from the Great Kei River to Coffee Bay including the now legendary **Bulungula Backpackers** (☎ 047-577 8900, 083-391 5525; www.bulungula.com; camp site per person/dm/d without bathroom US\$4/8/21; ☐). Renowned for its stunning location, community-based activities and eco-friendly ethos, Bulungula is 40% owned by the local Xhosa community, who run all the tours including horse-riding, hiking and canoeing trips. Guests are invited to help with community activities, including farming and teaching projects. There's an overall mellow vibe about the place, but it does get raucous when a beach party is organised. Xhosa-style rondavels – painted in creative, sometimes psychedelic, colour schemes – serve as guest quarters.

Reaching this little slice of paradise requires some effort. (If you can get here on local transport you get to stay the first night free – there's a challenge!). Bulungula is 4km north of the Xora river mouth and around two hours' drive from Coffee Bay. If you are coming in your own car it's essential to contact Bulungula in advance to get directions. Pick-ups can also be arranged.

PORT ST JOHNS

☎ 047 / pop 2100

The deliciously laid-back Port St Johns is a magnet for hippy types, both young and old. This idyllic little town on the coast at the mouth of the Umzimvubu River has tropical vegetation, dramatic cliffs, great beaches, no traffic jams and absolutely no stress. Many travellers succumb to the famous 'Pondo Fever' and stay for months.

Four kilometres from the town centre, **Amapondo Backpackers** (☎ 564 1344, 083-315 3103; www.amapondo.co.za; Second Beach Rd; camp site/dm/d without bathroom US\$6/10/24) is a beautiful and peaceful hostel with a great view of an idyllic beach. **Island Backpackers Lodge** (☎ 564 1958; www.theislandbackpackers.co.za; 4 Berea Rd; dm/d/tr without bathroom US\$9.50/24/30; ☐ ☐), which comes alive at night as a popular Israeli restaurant (dishes US\$4.70 to US\$7), also has laundry service, movies, book swap and a splash pool. Each room is beautifully decorated with scented candles and fluffy towels at **Gwyneth's Barn & Ekuphumleni** (☎ /fax 564 1506; off Pussfoot Lane, First Beach; d without bathroom US\$30, 2-bedroom cottage US\$47-59).

Most backpacker places will pick you up from the Shell Ultra City, 4km south of Mthatha (where the Baz Bus stops) for around US\$6, but it's essential to book ahead. There are also regular minibus taxis to Port St Johns from there (US\$4, two hours) that drop you at the roundabout.

KWAZULU-NATAL

Rough and ready, smart and sophisticated, rural and rustic, KwaZulu-Natal is as eclectic as its cultures, people and landscapes. It has its metropolitan heart in the port of Durban and its nearby historic capital, Pietermaritzburg. The beaches along this coast attract local holiday-makers, and to the north is Zululand, home to some Africa's most evocative traditional settlements and cultural sites. The region also boasts alluring national parks and isolated, wild coastal reserves. The province's border in the far west, the heritage-listed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range, features awesome peaks, unforgettable vistas and excellent hiking opportunities.

DURBAN

☎ 031 / pop 3.5 million

Stretching along a swathe of butter-yellow sand, South Africa's third-largest city offers a lively, if slightly tacky, prepackaged seaside holiday. The beachfront, with its multi-km stretch of high-rise hotels and snack bars, remains a city trademark, and the city centre, peppered with some grandiose colonial buildings and fascinating Art Deco architecture, throbs to a distinctly African beat. Home to the largest concentration of people of Indian descent in the country, Durban also boasts the sights, sounds and scents of the subcontinent. While the beachfront is still a favourite spot, many visitors, wary of the city's increasing reputation for crime, base themselves in the suburbs, which are chock-a-block with accommodation, shopping malls, funky bars and stylish eateries.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Most hostels offer internet access. Other options include the following:

Internet café (☎ 305 6998; 1st fl, Workshop, Aliwal St; per hr US\$3.40; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) In the city centre.

Internet café (☎ 202 7733; Musgrave Centre, Photoworld, Shop 323; per hr US\$4.50; ☎ 9am-6pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Entabeni Hospital (☎ 031-204 1200, 24hr trauma centre 031-204 1377; 148 South Ridge Rd, Berea) The trauma centre charges US\$80 per consultation.

Travel Doctor (☎ 031-360 1122; durban@traveldoctor.co.za; International Convention Centre, 45 Ordnance Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) For travel-related advice.

MONEY

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities across the city. These include Standard Bank, FNB and Nedbank.

American Express Central Durban (☎ 301 5541; 11th fl, Nedbank Bldg, Durban Club Place; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat; Musgrave Centre (☎ 202 8733; FNB House, 151 Musgrave Rd, Musgrave)

Rennies Bank Central Durban (☎ 305 5722; grd fl, 333 Smith St; Musgrave Centre (☎ 202 7833; Shop 311, Level 3, Musgrave Centre; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Durban Africa Tourist Junction (☎ 304 4934; www.durbanexperience.co.za; 1st fl, Tourist Junction; airport (☎ 408 1000; arrivals hall; ☎ 7am-9pm); Marine Pde (☎ 332 2595; next to Joe Kool's; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat & Sun); uShaka Marine World (☎ 337 8099; ☎ 9am-6pm).

KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority Information

Office (☎ 366 7516/7; www.zulu.org.za; grd fl, Tourist Junction)

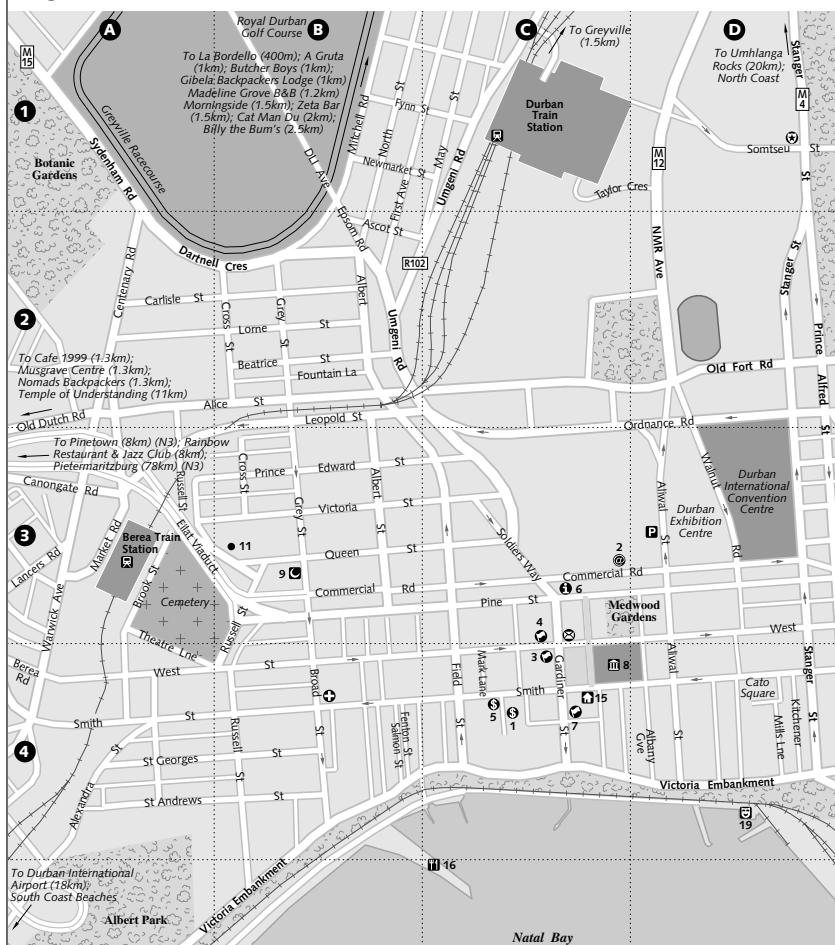
Tourist Junction (☎ 304 4934; 160 Pine St, cnr Soldiers Way; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) The main tourist information centre is in the old train station.

Sights

If you dip into the city's summer surf and sun, you have a playground of more than 6km of warm-water beaches (protected by the requisite shark nets). The 'Golden Mile' Beaches run from Blue Lagoon (at the mouth of the Umgeni River) to **uShaka Marine World** (☎ 368 6675; www.ushakamarineworld.co.za; Addington Beach, the Point; Wet'n'Wild adult/child/senior US\$8/6/6, Sea World US\$11/7.50/10; ☎ 9am-6pm high season, 10am-5pm low season) on the Point. But Durban's beachfront ain't for everyone. To some, its smorgasbord of bars and restaurants and hectic holiday atmosphere are garish and tacky.

Out on the Victoria Embankment, the **BAT Centre** (Maritime Pl) is a colourful, bohemian, arts

DURBAN



INFORMATION

American Express.....	1	C4
Durban Africa.....	(see 6)	
Internet Café.....	2	C3
KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority Information Office.....	(see 6)	
Lesotho Consulate.....	3	C4
Mozambican Consulate.....	4	C3
Rennies Bank.....	5	C4
Tourist Junction.....	6	C3
UK Consulate.....	7	C4
US Consulate.....	(see 5)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Art Gallery.....	(see 8)	
BAT Centre.....	(see 19)	
City Hall.....	8	C4
Juma Mosque.....	9	B3
uShaka Marine World.....	10	F5
Victoria St Market.....	11	B3

SLEEPING

City Lodge.....	12	E2
Parade Hotel.....	13	F3
Protea Hotel Edward Durban.....	14	F3
Royal Hotel.....	15	C4

EATING

New Cafe Fish.....	16	C5
Trans-Africa Express.....	(see 19)	

DRINKING

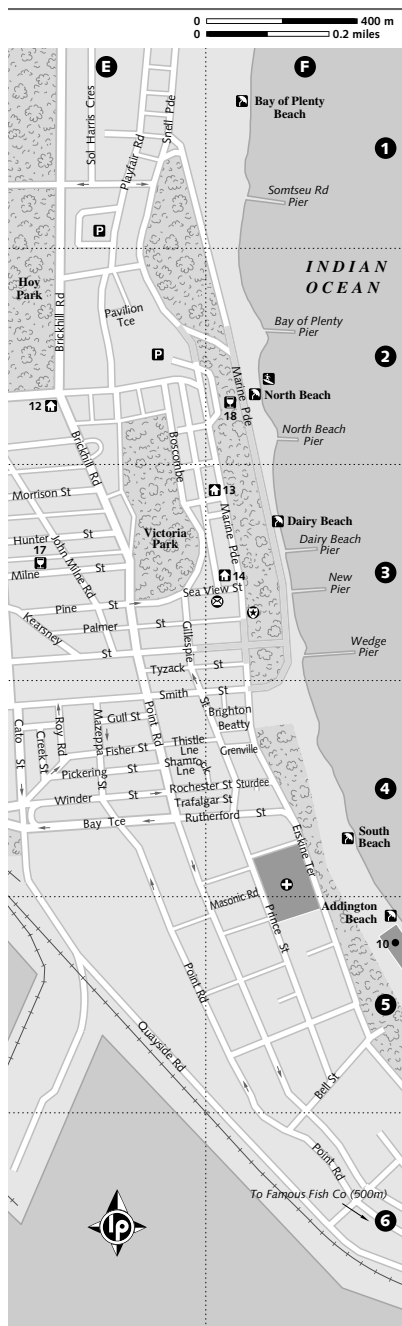
Cool Runnings.....	17	E3
Joe Kool's.....	18	F2

ENTERTAINMENT

BAT Centre.....	19	D4
-----------------	----	----

TRANSPORT

Baz Bus.....	(see 6)	
--------------	---------	--



centre housing upmarket art-and-craft shops, artists' studios, occasional live music, and a bar-restaurant, all cut through with a lively trans-Africa theme.

Dominating the city centre is the opulent 1910 Edwardian neo-baroque **City Hall** (☎ 311 2137; Smith St). In front of the hall is Francis Farewell Sq. Upstairs is the **Art Gallery** (☎ 311 2264; City Hall; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) an outstanding collection of contemporary South African works, especially Zulu arts and crafts.

The big **Juma Mosque** (☎ 306 0026; cnr Queen & Grey Sts; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11am Sat) is the largest in the southern hemisphere; call ahead for a guided tour.

At the western end of Victoria St, **Victoria St Market** (☎ 306 4021; Victoria St; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Sat, 6am-4pm Sun) offers a typically rip-roaring, sub-continental shopping experience, with more than 160 stalls selling wares from across Asia. It's the main tourist attraction in the area, but watch your wallet. Most Muslim shops close between noon and 2pm on Friday.

Situated 8km west of Durban is the **Temple of Understanding** (☎ 403 3328; Bhaktiedanta Sami Rd; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm), the biggest Hare Krishna temple in the southern hemisphere. Follow the N3 towards Pietermaritzburg and then branch off to the N2 south. Take the Chatsworth turn-off and turn right towards the centre of Chatsworth.

Sleeping

Despite what you think when you see the hotel-lined beachfront promenade, most of Durban's good-value accommodation is in the western and northwestern suburbs.

Nomads Backpackers (☎ 202 9709; www.durban.co.za/nomads; 70 Essenwood Rd, Berea; dm US\$8, d with/without bathroom US\$27/22; P ☎) An organised and neat, yet relaxed kind of joint, and one that likes to party. You're also only a jump away from the cinemas and cappuccino bars of the Musgrave Centre.

Gibela Backpackers Lodge (☎ 303 6291; www.gibela.co.za; 119 Ninth Ave, Morningside; dm/s/d with shared bathroom & breakfast US\$12/24/34; P ☎) Housed in a stylish terracotta-coloured 1950s building with a Tuscan feel, this place has tasteful ethnic décor and a friendly feel in a secure location.

Parade Hotel (☎ 337 4565; www.paradehotel.co.za; 191 Marine Pde; s/d incl breakfast US\$44/59; ☎) The Parade Hotel is a bit old, with a slightly dowdy

array of 1970s salesroom furniture and saggy mattresses, but it's charming Art Deco dining room resembles a 1950s ballroom.

Madeline Grove Bed & Breakfast (☎ 303 5425; www.madeline.co.za; 116 Madeline Rd, Morningside; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/61; (P) (S)) This large mansion is configured into various comfortable self-contained apartments, both upstairs and down. The separate poolside room is popular among water babies.

La Bordello (☎ 309 6019; www.beanbagbohemia.co.za; 47/49 Campbell Ave, Morningside; s/d US\$54/81; (S)) A former house of ill-repute, nowadays La Bordello does good trade with the beautiful people who enjoy its plush Moroccan interiors, aroma oils and breakfast in its small fountain court.

City Lodge (☎ 332 1447; www.citylodge.co.za; cnr Brickhill & Old Fort Rds; s/d US\$75/93; (P) (S)) This secure place offers motel styling and slick service, though little charm.

ProteaHotelEdwardDurban (☎ 3373681; www.protea-hotels.com/edwarddurban; 149 Marine Pde; s/d US\$112/125; (P) (S) (S) (S)) King of the seafront hotels, this is classic and comfortable, with fresh-polish smells and full-on décor with piped music to match.

Royal Hotel (☎ 333 6000; www.theroyal.co.za; 267 Smith St; s/d incl breakfast US\$220/292; (P) (S) (S)) This five-star institution overlooking City Hall is one of the city's most historical and swankiest offerings. It has hosted royalty and Nelson Mandela.

Eating

Takeaway places around Victoria St Market (p1009) have good Indian snacks including *bunny chow*, which is a half or quarter loaf of bread hollowed out and filled with curry stew.

While the beachfront is chock-a-block with cheap and cheerful diners, you'll be hard-pressed to find much more than the usual spread of burgers, pizza and candy floss. Several of the beachfront hotels house some passable restaurants.

Trans-Africa Express (☎ 332 0804; 1st fl, BAT Centre, Victoria Embankment; mains US\$3.80-13; (S) lunch & dinner) Upstairs at the BAT Centre, with terrace views over the docks, this restaurant serves taste-tempting meals from Madagascar to Morocco.

Cat Man Du (☎ 312 7893; 411 Windermere Rd; mains US\$4-13; (S) lunch & dinner) This groovy diner-cum-cocktail-bar serves international fusion-style

tucker in bar-like surrounds. Carnivores might like the kudu fillet in red wine (US\$11).

A Gruta (☎ 312 8675; 200C Florida Rd; mains US\$6-18; (S) lunch & dinner; (S)) If you're not heading on to Mozambique (or Portugal for that matter), this is a great place to sample the flavours of Iberia.

Cafe 1999 (☎ 202 3406; Silvervause Centre, Silverton Rd, Berea; mains US\$6-13; (S) lunch & dinner) This buzzing restaurant serves creative fusion food that comes in 'bitparts' – 'titbit' and 'bigbit'. Try the crispy roast duck on vanilla-seed risotto (US\$7).

Butcher Boys (☎ 312 8248; 170 Florida Rd; mains US\$8-12; (S) lunch & dinner; (S)) A stylish joint serving 'steak as you like it,' Butcher Boys is popular with business people and the 'it' market.

New Cafe Fish (☎ 305 5062; 31 Yacht Mole, Victoria Embankment; mains US\$6-27; (S) lunch & dinner) Looking like an upside-down ship, this uniquely designed restaurant serves seafood dishes as appealing as its views.

Famous Fish Co (☎ 368 1060; King's Battery, the Point; mains US\$10-26; (S) lunch & dinner; (S)) This reliable fish restaurant is something of a Durban institution, with a dreamy view of the sea and cargo ships.

Drinking

The best options are found in the suburbs.

Zeta Bar (☎ 312 9436; 258 Florida Rd) Voluptuous red-plush seats combined with curvy soft lines provide the backdrop for this lounge lizard's favourite.

Billy the Bum's (☎ 303 1988; 504 Windermere Rd, Morningside) Attracting a crowd of Durban's upwardly mobile, this suburban cocktail bar is reliably raucous.

Cool Runnings (☎ 368 5604; 49 Milne St) This (in)famous place has a truly Rasta bohemian feel. Come late as it fills up after 11pm and catch a cab – this is *not* an area to walk around.

Joe Kool's (☎ 332 9697; Lower Marine Pde, North Beach) This venerable nightspot cooks up a cocktail of cold beer, big-screen TV, dance music and feisty crowds. Sunday night is party night.

Entertainment

BAT Centre (☎ 332 0451; www.batcentre.co.za; 45 Maritime Pl, Victoria Embankment) One of Durban's more interesting haunts, this venue features everything from DJs on Friday and Sunday evenings, regular drum circles, and top-flight jazz musicians.

Rainbow Restaurant & Jazz Club (☎ 702 9161; 23 Stanfield Lane) In Pinetown, 8km west of the centre, Rainbow is considered the centre of the jazz scene, and is still the preferred local haunt.

Getting There & Away

Durban International Airport is off the N2, 18km south of the city. Several airlines link Durban with South Africa's main centres.

The popular and useful **Baz Bus** (☎ 304 9099; www.bazbus.com; 1st fl, Tourist Junction; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) has an office next to Durban Africa.

Long-distance buses leave from the bus stations near the Durban train station. It's safest to enter from NMR Ave, not Umgeni Rd. All of the major companies have daily departures to Jo'burg (US\$26 to US\$30, eight hours), Cape Town (US\$63, 22 to 27 hours), Port Elizabeth (US\$44, 15 hours) and Pietermaritzburg (US\$12, one hour), among other destinations. Buses also run to Gaborone (via Jo'burg; US\$47, 15½ hours) and Maputo (via Jo'burg; US\$31, 15 hours).

Some long-distance minibus taxis running mainly to the south coast and the Wild Coast region of Eastern Cape leave from around the Berea train station. To Jo'burg it costs US\$18. The areas in and around the minibus taxis' ranks are unsafe and extreme care should be taken if entering them.

Durban train station (☎ 0860-008 888) is huge. Use the NMR Ave entrance, 1st level. Even hardy travellers report feeling unsafe on the local inner-city and suburban trains. Long-distance services are another matter – they are efficient and arranged into separate male and female sleeper compartments for Jo'burg (1st/2nd class US\$34/22, 12½ hours).

Getting Around

The **Airport Shuttle Bus** (☎ 465 1660) departs the airport regularly to the beach and city centre's major hotels (US\$4). Some hostels run their own taxi shuttle services.

The main bus terminal and information centre for inner-city and metropolitan buses is on Commercial Rd.

Durban Transport (☎ 309 5942) runs the bus services Mynah and Aqualine. Mynah covers most of the beachfront and central residential areas. Trips cost around US\$0.40. The larger Aqualine buses run through the outer-lying Durban metropolitan area.

A taxi between the beach and Florida Rd, Morningside costs about US\$4.

AROUND DURBAN

The South Coast is a 160km-long string of sea-side resorts and suburbs running from Durban to Port Edward, near the Eastern Cape border. There's a bit of a Ground Hog Day feel about the mass of shoulder-to-shoulder getaways along the N2 and Rte 102, albeit a pleasant one. The region is a surfers' and divers' delight (the latter because of the Aliwal Shoal), and in summer there ain't much room to swing a broly. The stunning **Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve** (☎ 039-679 1644; www.kzn.wildlife.com; admission US\$1.40, camp site US\$4, 2-bed hut US\$15; ☎ 6am-6pm), close to Port Shepstone, the South Coast's industrial administrative centre, provides beautiful forest walks, eating and accommodation options. Nearby Margate is the claustrophobic holiday hub.

The stretch of coast from Umhlanga Rocks north to the Tugela River is a profusion of upmarket timeshare apartments and retirement villages, with some pleasant beaches. The section from Zimbali, slightly north of Umhlanga, to the Tugela is known as the Dolphin Coast because of the bottlenose dolphins that favour the area. The North Coast is home to a fascinating mix of peoples: descendants of former colonialists, Indians, French Mauritian sugar-cane growers and indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent, plus colourful Zulu cultures.

PIETERMARITZBURG

☎ 033 / pop 457,000

Billed as the heritage city, and KZN's administrative and legislative capital (previously shared with Ulundi), Pietermaritzburg's (usually known as 'PMB') grand historic buildings hark back to an age of pith helmets and midday martinis. By day, the city is vibrant: its large Zulu community sets a colourful flavour and the Indian community brings echoes of the subcontinent to its busy streets. A large student population adds to the city's vitality.

Pietermaritzburg is where you need to book most of the accommodation and walks for KwaZulu-Natal Parks. The **KZN Wildlife Headquarters** (☎ 845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Queen Elizabeth Park, Duncan McKenzie Dr; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is a long way northwest of the town centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Umphiti Backpackers (☎ 394 3490; umphiti@mweb.co.za; 317 Bulwer St; dm US\$10, d from US\$23; 🍷) The many wagging tails reflect the warm welcome at this friendly, if a little dog-eared, bohemian place. It offers a wealth of information and activities.

Prince Alfred Street Backpackers (☎ 345 7045; www.chauncey.co.za; 312 Prince Alfred St; s/d US\$11/23) This bright place, with multicoloured mosquito-net extravaganzas and ethnic adornments, is one of the most stylish renovated 'backpackers' around, and handy to the centre.

Duvet & Crumpets (☎ 394 4133; www.duvetandcrumpets.co.za; 1 Freeland Pl; s/d US\$27/40; 🍷) Set in a quiet, leafy location, this place offers a combination of unpretentious, clean rooms and self-catering units.

Torwood Lodge (☎ 390 1072; www.torwood.co.za; twUS\$57; 🍷) With a quaint rural setting and a landscaped rock pool, this excellent out-of-town option is great for those seeking city days and rustic nights.

Els Amics (☎ 345 6524; 380 Longmarket St; mains US\$5.50-13; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) The city's fine-dining option is in a cosy Victorian house with a series of rooms and a classy Spanish-influenced menu. Bookings are essential.

Afro Cafe 94 (☎ 345 0773; 266 Prince Alfred St; mains US\$3.40-11; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Carnivores can get their mouths around 'world African cuisine': from Hluhluwe impala salad to springbok loin and Cuban oxtail.

Getting There & Away

Pietermaritzburg airport, also known as the Oribi airport, is 6km southeast of the city and private taxis are available. **SAAirlink** (☎ 386 92861), with an office at the airport, flies to Jo'burg daily (US\$114).

Bus companies Greyhound, Translux, SA Roadlink, Luxliner and Intercap offer similar prices depending on the level of onboard services. Destinations offered include Jo'burg (US\$17 to US\$27, six to seven hours), Cape Town (US\$54, 22 hours), Pretoria (US\$26, seven to eight hours), Port Elizabeth (US\$42, 15 hours) and Durban (US\$7 to US\$24, 1½ hours).

Cheetah Coaches (☎ 342 4444) runs daily (US\$8) between Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Durban International Airport. **Sani Pass Carriers** (☎ 701 1017; spc@y.co.za) runs buses up into the southern Drakensberg. The **Baz Bus**

(☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) travels between Durban and Pietermaritzburg twice a week.

KWAZULU-NATAL RESERVES Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park

☎ 035

These magnificent twin reserves (☎ 550 8476; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$9.50/4.70; 🕒 5am-7pm Nov-Feb, 6am-6pm Mar-Oct), dominated by woodland savannah and flood plains, are good places to spot 'the Big Five'. Travel to the northern reaches of the park, and forests full of mist, grassy hills and peaceful rivers will entrance you.

One of Imfolozi's main attractions is its extensive trail system in a special 24,000-hectare wilderness area (note: these are seasonal). The **Base Trail** (3 nights/4 days US\$363) is, as the name suggests, at a base camp. On the **Primitive Trail** (4 nights/5 days US\$240), you carry equipment, help prepare the food (provided), and hikers must sit up in 1½-hour watches during the night.

The signature resort on the Hluhluwe side, with stupendous views, is **Hilltop Camp** (☎ 562 0848; rest hut/chalet per person US\$31/63, 2-bed unit with full board per person US\$63). Try one of the smaller and more sedate accommodation centres in Imfolozi for more peace and quiet. Morning and night wildlife drives (US\$20 per person) from here are very popular.

The main entrance to Hluhluwe, at Memorial Gate, is 15km west of the N2, about 50km northwest of Mtubatuba. Petrol is available at Mpila Camp in the park.

Greater St Lucia Wetland Park

☎ 035

The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, a Unesco World Heritage Site, stretches for 280 glorious kilometres, from the Mozambican border near Kosi Bay in the north of Maputaland, to Mapeplane (Maphelana) at the southern end of Lake St Lucia. With the Indian Ocean on one side, and a series of lakes on the other (including Lake St Lucia), the 328,000-hectare area offers everything from offshore reefs and beaches, to lakes, wetlands, woodlands and coastal forests.

Most hostels rent snorkelling equipment and can organise tours through one of the many tour operators that have offices based in St Lucia Estuary, the park's main resort town. Birding, boat tours, canoeing, hiking, horse riding, turtle tours, whale-watching, and wildlife drives can all be arranged.

In St Lucia Estuary itself, you can camp at three sites run by **KZN Wildlife** (☎ 033-845 1000, 590 1340; www.kznwildlife.com; Pelican St) for around US\$7 per person.



Occupying a series of sprawling buildings, the rooms at **Bib's International Backpackers** (☎ 590 1056; www.bibs.co.za; 310 MacKenzie St; camp site US\$6, dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/20, d US\$27;   ) are tarnished, but the atmosphere makes up for it. **Santa Lucia Guest House** (☎ 590 1151; www.santalucia.co.za; 30 Pelican St; s/d incl breakfast US\$39/78;  ) is a highly acclaimed B&B with friendly and hospitable owners.

The **Baz Bus** (☎ in Durban 031-304 9099; www.bazbus.com) drops backpackers several times a week.

Sodwana Bay

☎ 035

Spectacular Sodwana Bay, a sheltered recess at the very northern tip of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, isn't a whole lot more than sand, sea and silence. And that's its appeal. The spread-out village of Sodwana Bay is also here, but the two nearby parks – **Sodwana Bay National Park** (☎ 571 0051; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/2; ☎ 6am–6pm) and **Ozabeni** – provide most of the highlights. This little slice of paradise offers stunning coastal scenery, guided walking trails, serious deep-sea game fishing and scuba diving.



KZN Wildlife (☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com; Ozabeni camp sites per person US\$4, Sodwana Bay National Park camp sites/5-bed cabins per person US\$19/30) offers camping at Ozabeni, and hundreds of camp sites and cabins at Sodwana Bay National Park. **Coral Divers** (☎ 571 0290; coraldivers@mweb.co.za; Sodwana Bay National Park; s/d without bathroom from US\$25/40;  ) is a factory-style operation, nevertheless it has cabins in a lovely setting, satellite TV, a pool and a bar.

Minibus taxis run from the N2 up to the small town of Jozini. From there to Sodwana Bay you shouldn't have trouble finding taxi transport.

ZULULAND

Dominated by the Zulu tribal group, the region offers a fascinating historical and contemporary insight into one of the country's most enigmatic, and best-known, cultures. Intense poverty and all the social problems that come with it are still commonplace.

Situated around a beautiful indigenous forest and surrounded by green rolling hills, the town of Eshowe (population 14,700) has a

rural, rough-and-tumble atmosphere, but the suburbs are leafy and quiet. It is well placed for exploring the wider region, and there are many decent attractions and accommodation options on offer. The **George Hotel & Zululand Backpackers** (☎ 035-474 4919; www.eshowe.com; 38 Main St; s/d incl breakfast US\$33/47;  ) oozes colonial-era pretensions. The separate **backpackers** (camp site US\$7, dm/s/d without bathroom US\$10/18/24) is hung-over, but the George's microbrewery and 101 activities are also on tap.

Minibus taxis connect to Empangeni, (US\$4, one hour), Gingindlovu (US\$0.90) and Melmoth (US\$2.80, 45 minutes), the best place to catch taxis deeper into Zululand.

THE DRAKENSBURG

The tabletop peaks of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg range, which form the boundary between South Africa and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, offer some of the country's most awe-inspiring landscapes. This vast 243,000-hectare sweep of basalt summits and buttresses are so recognisably South African that they've become tourist-brochure clichés. If any landscape lives up to its airbrushed, publicity-shot alter ego, it is the jagged, green sweep of the Drakensberg.

The Drakensberg (or the 'Berg', as it's often called) is usually divided into three sections, although the distinctions aren't strict.

The northern Drakensberg runs from the Golden Gate Highlands National Park to the Royal Natal National Park. Harrismith and Bergville are sizeable towns in this area.

The central Drakensberg's main feature is Giant's Castle Game Reserve, the largest national park in the area. Northwest of Giant's Castle is the Cathedral Peak wilderness area. The towns of Bergville, Estcourt and Winterton are all adjacent to the central Drakensberg.

The southern Drakensberg runs down to the Transkei. This area is less developed than the others, but is no less spectacular. There's a huge wilderness area, and the Sani Pass route into southern Lesotho.

There's no single road linking all the main areas of interest so you're better off selecting one (or a few only) places rather than spending most of your time behind a wheel in search of sights. In general, you must book all KZN Wildlife accommodation (except camping) in

advance through either the Pietermaritzburg or Durban KZN Wildlife branches. There are also several local information offices:

Central Drakensberg Information Centre (☎ 036-488 1207; www.cdic.co.za; Thokozisa; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Based in the Thokozisa complex, 13km outside Winterton on Rte 600, this private enterprise is extremely helpful.

Okhahlamba Drakensberg Tourism (☎ 036-448 1557; www.drakensberg.org.za; Tatham Rd, Bergville; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Covers the northern and central Drakensberg.

Southern Drakensberg Escape Tourism Centre (☎ 033-701 1471; www.drakensberg.org; Clocktower Centre, Old Main Rd, Underberg; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) Covers the southern region from Underberg, Himeville and Sani Pass.

ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

☎ 036

Spanning out from some of the range's loftiest summits, the 8000-hectare **Royal Natal Park** (☎ 438 6310; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$3.40/2; ☎ 5am-7pm) has a presence that far outstrips its relatively meagre size, with many of the surrounding peaks rising as high into the air as the park stretches across. With some of the Drakensberg's most dramatic and accessible scenery, the park is crowned by the sublime Amphitheatre, an 8km wall of cliff and canyon equally spectacular from below or from up on high. Looming up behind is Mont-aux-Sources (3282m), so called because the Tugela, Elands and Western Khubedu Rivers rise here; the last eventually becomes the Orange River and flows all the way to the Atlantic.

The park's **visitors centre** (☎ 8am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm) is about 1km in from the main gate. There's also a shop selling basic provisions. Fuel is available in the park.

Except for the **Amphitheatre-to-Cathedral** (62km, four to five days) and the **Mont-aux-Sources** (20km, 10 hours) hikes, most of the 25-odd walks in Royal Natal are day walks. The park has become a mecca for climbers. You must apply for a permit from the KZN Wildlife office.

If you plan to camp on the mountain, you should book with the **QwaQwa tourist officer** (☎ 058-713 4415). Otherwise there's a basic hut on the escarpment near Tugela Falls. An overnight hiking permit costs US\$4.

Thendele (☎ 033-845 1000; chalet per person US\$43-47), the park's main camp has a variety of accommodation, including some reason-

able two-bed chalets. There are also several places outside the park, including **Amphitheatre Backpackers** (☎ 438 6106; amphibackpackers@worldonline.co.za; camp site US\$5.50, dm/d US\$10/22), 21km north of Bergville.

CENTRAL BERG

☎ 036

Crowned with some of the Drakensberg's most formidable peaks – Giant's Castle Peak (3312m), the Monk's Cowl (3234m) and Champagne Castle (3377m) are found here – the central Berg is a big hit with climbers. But with dramatic scenery aplenty, this beautiful region is just as popular with those who prefer to admire their mountains from a safe distance.

A beautifully photogenic area in the shadow of the ramparts of Cathedral Peak, the **Cathedral Peak Nature Reserve** (☎ 488 8000; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$3.40/1.80; ☎ 6am-6pm) includes the Bell (2930m), the Horns (3005m) and Cleft Peak (3261m). Cathedral Peak is a long day's climb (10km, seven hours return).

The **park office** (☎ 488 8000; www.kznwildlife.com), in Didima Camp, sells permits for the scenic drive (4WD only) up Mike's Pass (per person/vehicle US\$2/4.70) and arranges guides.

Monk's Cowl Nature Reserve (☎ 468 1103; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; ☎ 6am-6pm) is another stunning slice of the Drakensberg range; within Monk's Cowl are the two peaks Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle. The **park office** (☎ 468 1103; camp site per person US\$9.50) is 3km beyond Champagne Castle Hotel. The office takes bookings for camping and overnight hiking (US\$4 per person).

The **Inkosana Lodge** (☎ 468 1202; www.inkosana.co.za; dm/d without bathroom US\$11/34, thatched rondavels with/without bathroom US\$25/17; ☎), one of the best backpackers in KZN, boasts an indigenous garden and clean rooms, and heaps of activities and walks are on offer.

Rising up to Injasuti Dome (3409m), South Africa's highest peak, **Giant's Castle Game Reserve** (☎ 033-845 1000, 353 3718; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$3.40/1.80; ☎ 5am-7pm) is one of the Drakensberg's loftiest – even its lowest point sits at 1300m above sea level. It's a rugged, remote and popular destination, with huge forest reserves to the north and south, and Lesotho's barren plateau over the escarpment to the west.

There are several accommodation centres inside the reserve, as well as trail huts and caves for hikers.

SOUTHERN DRakensberg WILDERNESS AREAS

Best accessed from the pleasant towns of Himelville and Underberg, the southern Berg boasts one of the region's highlights: the journey up to Lesotho over the Sani Pass. It is also renowned as a serious hiking area, and as well as some great walks, including the fabulous Giant's Cup Trail, the region also offers a smorgasbord of wilderness areas.

The **Mkhomazi Nature Reserve** (☎ 033-266 6444; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; ☞ 6am-6pm) is one of the few places where you can hike for days without seeing anyone else.

The park office of **Garden Castle** (☎ 033-701 1823; www.kznwildlife.com; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; camp site per person US\$5.50, hut per person US\$8; ☞ 6am-6pm) is 30km west of Underberg – carry along the road past Khotso Horse Trails. This reserve incorporates beautiful **Bushman's Nek Valley**, dominated by the 3051m Rhino Peak.

The drive up the **Sani Pass** is a trip to the roof of South Africa: a spectacular ride around hairpin bends into the clouds to the kingdom of Lesotho. At 2865m, this is the highest pass in the country, and the vistas (on a clear day!) are magical. There are hikes in almost every direction, and inexpensive horse rides are available. Amazingly, this is also the only road link between Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal. You need a passport to cross into Lesotho. The border is open daily from 8am to 4pm on the South African side (until 5pm on the Lesotho side).

At the bottom of the pass you can sleep at the **Sani Lodge** (☎ 033-702 0330; www.sani-lodge.co.za; camp site US\$6; dm/d without bathroom US\$9/11, 2-bed rondavel US\$30), which besides accommodation offers a range of fabulous tours and activities and insider tips about the region through its tour company.

Without doubt, the **Giant's Cup Trail** (68km, five days and five nights), running from Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek, is one of the nation's great walks. Early booking through **KZN Wildlife** (☎ in Pietermaritzburg 033-845 1000) is advisable.

GAUTENG

Fast, bustling and a cabaret of contradictions, Gauteng (pronounced 'how-teng') covers just 1.5% of the country's land surface, yet accounts for 34% of its gross domestic product (GDP) and, perhaps more extraordinarily,

10% of the GDP of the whole of Africa. The laid-back, friendly atmosphere of Pretoria, the country's administrative capital, belies a turbulent past. Fifty or so kilometres down the M1 motorway away is Johannesburg, the provincial capital and third-largest city on the continent. Sprawling and booming, it's a strange conurbation of opulent suburbs set alongside some of the country's starkest urban poverty.

JOHANNESBURG

☎ 011 / pop 5.7 million

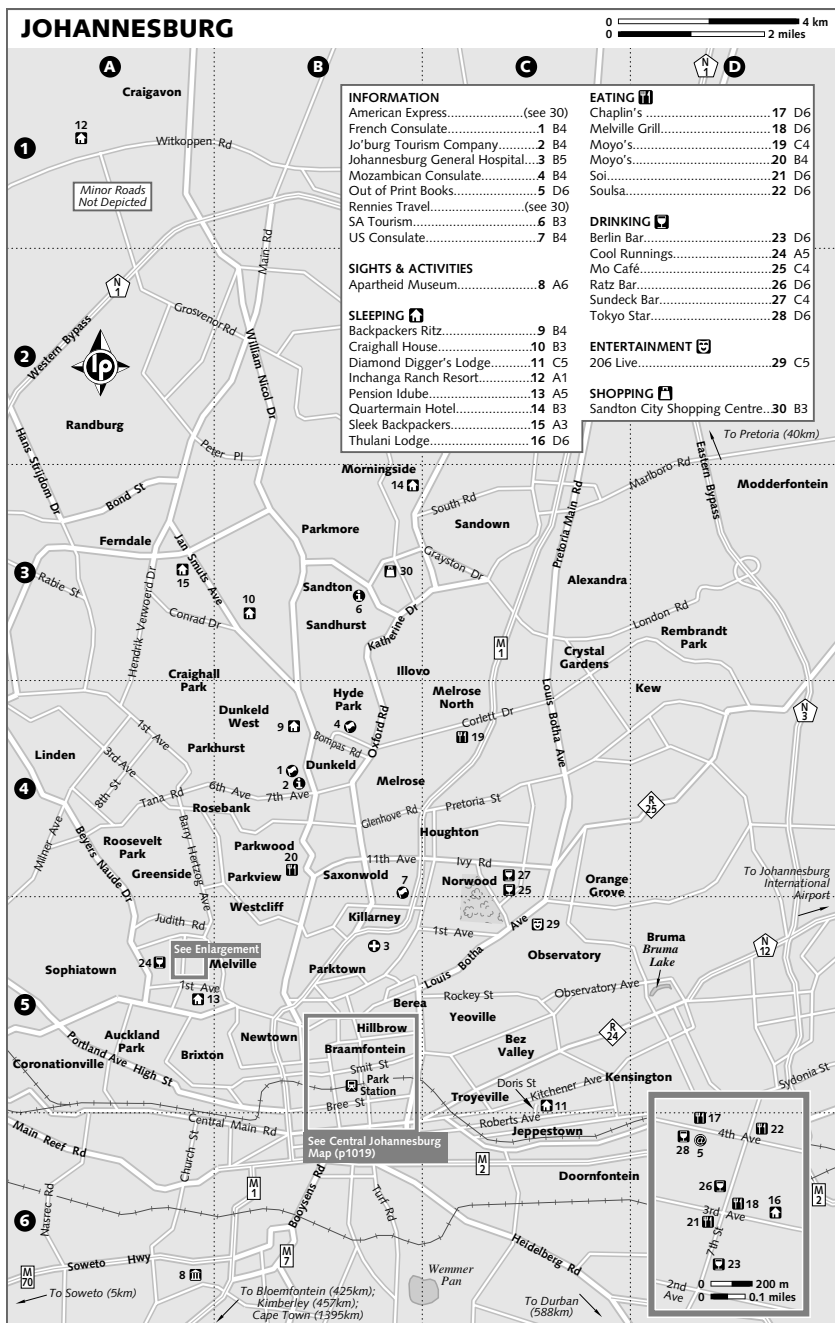
Jo'burg, or 'Jozi' as it's more commonly known, is without a doubt the great big beating heart of South Africa, and has long played a Jekyll-and-Hyde role in the global consciousness. Often the stage on which the epic of this extraordinary nation has been played out, the colossus of Jo'burg – with all its thrills and foibles – is today a fascinating, multitudinous city, where all the ups and downs of 21st-century South Africa can be witnessed in three, multicolour dimensions.

In the past, the city's darker personality proved the most enduring. The Jo'burg of the newflash was a city where fear and loathing reigned supreme; a city where spiralling gun crime and poverty had manifested itself in a society where one half of the population stagnated, while the other looked on impassively through coils of razor wire.

As ever, there is an element of truth to the stereotypes. Jo'burg does bear scars of South Africa's turbulent 20th century, and many will take time to heal. Stark inequalities persist, but armed with a new self-confidence – ironically most pronounced in the infamous township of Soweto – Africa's giant hub is beginning to introduce itself to a healthier diet of urban renewal and social regeneration.

Orientation

Johannesburg International Airport (JIA) is 25km northeast of the city centre. The large city centre, laid out on a straightforward grid, is dominated by office blocks; after shops close, it becomes a virtual ghost town. Redevelopment of the Newtown cultural precinct at the northwestern edge of the city is at the core of an effort to clean up central Jo'burg. North of the centre, a steep ridge runs west-east from Braamfontein across to the dangerous suburb of Hillbrow. To the northeast of the centre is the equally dangerous Yeoville.



The northern suburbs of big houses and big fences are predominantly white, middle- and upper-class, and where most travellers stay. Sterile shopping malls form the centre of most social life. The inner-suburban restaurant enclaves of Melville, Greenside, Parkhurst and Norwood make a refreshing change.

The black townships ring the city and present a stark contrast to the northern suburbs. Conditions within them range from the stereotypically suburban to the appalling. The main township is Soweto (p1018), but other big townships surround the city in all directions.

Information

EMERGENCY

AIDS line (☎ 0800-012 322)

Fire (☎ 10111)

Rape Crisis Line (☎ 116 1888)

SA Police Headquarters (Map p1019; ☎ 10111; Main Rd)

INTERNET ACCESS

Most hostels and hotels have internet facilities, charging anything from US\$2.80 to US\$8 per hour. Alternatively, most Jo'burg malls and suburbs have an internet café, and wi-fi hotspots are popping up everywhere. **Out of Print Books** (Map p1016; ☎ 482 6026; 78 4th Ave, Melville; per min US\$0.10; ☎ 10am-9pm), in the centre of Melville, is pricey but open later than most.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Johannesburg General Hospital (Map p1016;

☎ 011-488 4911; M1/Jubilee Rd, Parktown) Jo'burg's main public hospital.

MONEY

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities at every commercial centre. American Express and Rennies Travel (an agent for Thomas Cook) have branches at the airport and in major malls.

POST

Main Post Office (Map p1019; ☎ 0800 110 226; Jeppe St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Gauteng Tourism Authority (Map p1019; ☎ 639

1600; www.gauteng.net; 1 Central Place, cnr Jeppe & Henry Nxumalo St, Newtown; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

The tourist body's glistening new headquarters are in the middle of the Newtown Cultural Precinct. Staff members are eager but woefully undertrained.

Jo'burg Tourism Company (Map p1016; ☎ 214 0700; deon@joburgtourism.com; grd fl, Grosvenor Cnr, 195 Jan Smuts Ave, Parktown North; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) A private endeavour; covers the city of Jo'burg.

SA Tourism (Map p1016; ☎ 895 3000; fax 895 3001; 12 Protea Rd, Sandton; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Dangers & Annoyances

Pay careful attention to your personal security in Jo'burg. Daylight muggings in the city centre and other inner suburbs, notably Hillbrow, are not uncommon and you must be constantly on your guard. You'd be crazy to walk around central Jo'burg at night – if you arrive after dark and don't have a car, catch a taxi to your final destination.

Crime is a big problem, but it is important to put things in perspective: remember that most travellers come and go without incident and that much of the crime afflicts parts of the city you would have little reason to stray into. It's when using ATMs that you're most vulnerable. Seek local advice, listen to it and remain aware of what's going on around you.

Sights & Activities

CITY CENTRE & NEWTON

The area retains its edgy atmosphere, but regeneration projects in Newtown to the south and university-oriented Braamfontein to the north are gradually helping to boost confidence once more in the heart of the city.

To get an overview of the hub of Jo'burg, take the lift to the **Top of Africa** (Map p1019; ☎ 308 1331; 50th fl, Carlton Centre, 152 Commissioner St; adult/child US\$1.40/1; ☎ 9am-7pm). From the quiet remoteness of the observation deck, the sprawling city seems positively serene.

Today, Newtown is at the centre of efforts to rejuvenate the downtown area. Surrounded by museums and cafés, Newtown's cultural precinct, which occupies the newly brushed-up **Mary Fitzgerald Sq** (named after South Africa's first female trade unionist; Map p1019), is a good place to start a tour.

The nearby **Market Theatre complex** (p1020), with its shows, bars and restaurants, is an excellent place to while away a few hours between museum visits.

CONSTITUTION HILL

Inspiring, impressive **Constitution Hill** (Map p1019; ☎ 381 3100; www.constitutionhill.co.za; Kotze St; adult/child US\$2.80/1.40; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Mon) is slowly becoming one of the city's – if not the country's – chief

tourist attractions. Built within the ramparts of the **Old Fort**, which dates from 1892 and was once a notorious prison, the development focuses on South Africa's new **Constitutional Court**, itself is a very real symbol of the changing South Africa, with cases heard in all 11 official languages.

SOUTHERN SUBURBS

The **Apartheid Museum** (Map p1016; ☎ 309 4700; www.apartheidmuseum.org; cnr Gold Reef Rd & Northern Parkway; adult/child US\$3.40/1.60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) remains one of South Africa's most evocative museums, using film, text, audio and live accounts to provide a colourful insight into the architecture, implementation and eventual unravelling of the apartheid system.

SOWETO

Home to about 3.5 million people, Soweto is one of the most infamous ghettos in the world, and a tour must not be missed. Soweto has had a face-lift in recent years, and some of its suburbs are looking downright affluent. Others remain as sad as any other ghetto in the developing world—cardboard and tin shacks with no plumbing. It might seem odd, even voyeuristic, to treat these places as a tourist attraction, but to get any kind of appreciation for South African reality, you have to visit them. It's also another way of supporting local, black-owned businesses directly. The new, impressive **Soweto Tourism and Information Centre** (☎ 945 3111; Walter Sisulu Sq, Kliptown; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is testament to a growing tourism policy here and a first for any township. It provides information, and an accommodation and tour booking service. Dozens of companies provide tours including **Imbizo Tours** (☎ 838 2667; per person R310).

Sleeping

Diamond Digger's Lodge (Map p1016; ☎ 624 1676; www.oneandonly.co.za; 36 Doris St, Kensington; dm/d without bathroom US\$9.50/24; (P)) An excellent backpackers, with every imaginable amenity, including a Jacuzzi, sauna, a big-screen home cinema and a pub for post-tour frolics.

Sleek Backpackers (☎ 787 8070; www.sleekhostel.150m.com; 477 Jan Smuts Ave, Randburg; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/14/27; (P) (Q) (S)) This converted house is now a small hostel run with a personal touch. Dorms and doubles are basic but clean. It's in a handy location, about halfway between the city centre and Fourways.

Backpackers Ritz (Map p1016; ☎ 325 7125; www.backpackers-ritz.co.za; 1A North Rd, Dunkeld West; dm/s/d without bathroom US\$11/24/35; (P) (Q) (S)) Certainly not 'The Ritz', this backpackers is in a characterful old mansion a safe hop-and-a-skip from Hyde Park Mall, and plenty of bars and restaurants.

Inchanga Ranch Resort (☎ 708 2505; www.inchanga.co.za; 51 Inchanga Rd, Craigavon; camp site US\$5.50, dm/s/d US\$10/27/34, cabins from US\$20; (P) (Q) (S)) A wonderful country retreat just minutes from the shops and casino of Montecasino. Accommodation is in cute private A-frame huts with animal-print linens.

Pension Idube (☎ 482 4055; idube@mail.com; 11 Walton Ave, Auckland Park; d with/without bathroom incl breakfast US\$45/36; (P) (S)) This positively unpretentious place bedecked in zebra motifs can't be beaten for its combination of comfort, price and location.

Craighall House (Map p1016; ☎ 326 0326; craighallhouse@mweb.co.za; 10 Alexandra Ave, Craighall; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/67; (P) (S)) Well located, more or less halfway between Rosebank and Sandton, this guesthouse has neatly designed rooms each with private entrance and patio, a beautiful garden and swimming pool.

Thulani Lodge (☎ 482 1106; www.thulanilodge.co.za; 85 Third Ave; s/d incl breakfast US\$54/67; (P) (S)) Despite its top location just metres from Melville's nightlife, Thulani manages to offer peace and quiet in a series of small, neat rooms clustered intimately around a sparkling swimming pool.

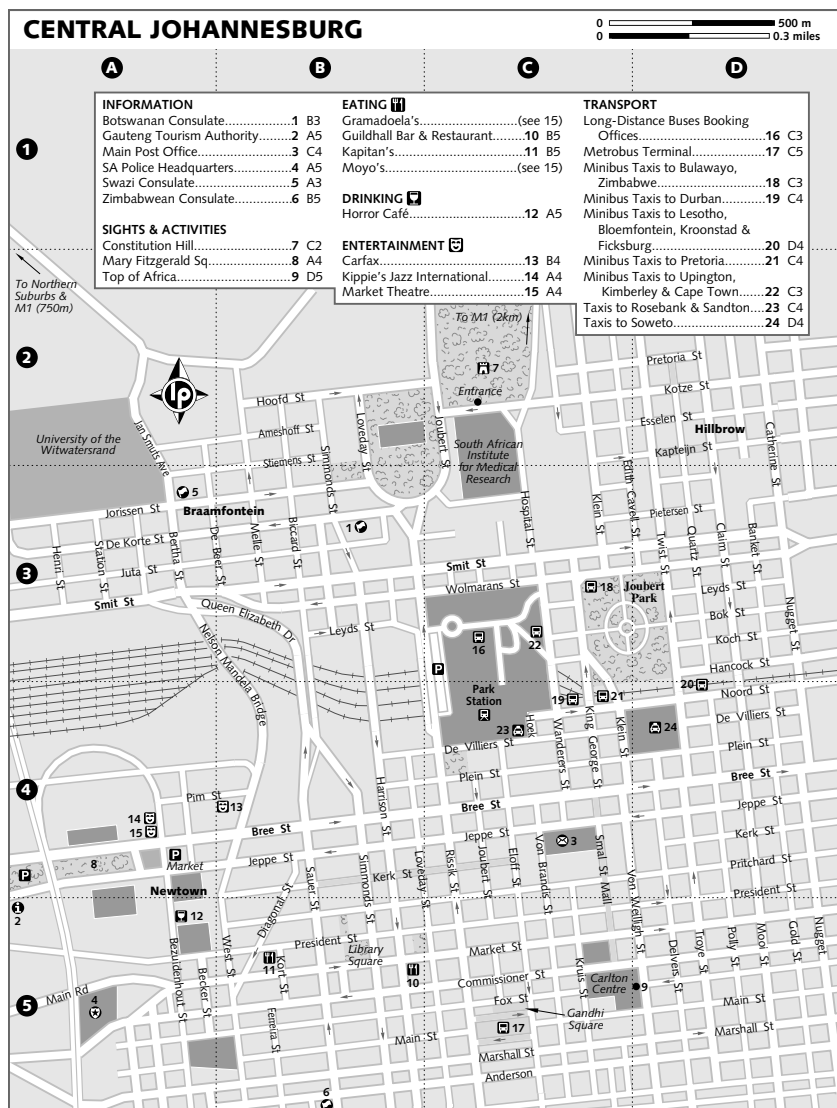
Quatermain Hotel (☎ 290 0900; www.quatermain.co.za; 137 West Rd South, Morningside; s/d incl breakfast US\$103/143; (P) (Q) (S)) This is one of Jo'burg's best options, with stylish fittings, excellent service and a great location near the glitz of Sandton. Its award-winning restaurant, The Courier, is another huge bonus.

Eating

Unfortunately for those without cars, most of the best places are scattered around the northern suburbs. The suburb of Norwood has an enclave of restaurants that has grown and matured into an east Jo'burg version of Melville's 7th St. There are more than 20 bars, restaurants and cafés along Grant Ave.

CITY CENTRE & NEWTOWN

Guildhall Bar & Restaurant (Map p1019; ☎ 833 1770; 88 Market St; mains US\$4.70-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) Established in 1888, you can while away the day in the pub below, or sit on the balcony and watch the city pass you by over a pie and chips.



Kapitan's (Map p1019; ☎ 834 8048; 11A Kort St; mains US\$4-8; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Kapitan's is one of the few places in town where you'll see young lions drinking with hepcats, and grizzly city stalwarts groaning about how it's all gone to the dogs.

Gramadoela's (Map p1019; ☎ 838 6960; Bree St, Newtown; mains US\$5.50-12; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Full of

curios and character, this gay-friendly Newtown classic in the Market Theatre complex whips up a mean mix of African and Asian cuisine.

Moyo's (Map p1019; ☎ 838 1715; Bree St; www.moyo.co.za; mains US\$7-13; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Oozing chi-chi African charm, this busy chain offers an innovative menu of contemporary African eats.

MELVILLE

Soulsa (☎ 482 5572; 16 7th St; mains US\$4.70-12; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺) Funky décor, differing day and night menus featuring fusion South African cooking, and outdoor sofas have made Soulsa a Melville favourite. Breakfast is served on weekends.

Soi (☎ 726 5775; cnr 7th St & 3rd Ave; mains US\$6-12; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺) The Thai and Vietnamese food is fresh and zesty, and there's a bar full of beautiful people attached.

Melville Grill (☎ 727 2812; cnr 7th St & 3rd Ave; mains US\$7-16; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺) The only place for a hardcore meat feast, this upmarket steakhouse serves sublime aged cuts in modern surrounds.

Chaplin's (☎ 482 4657; 85 4th Ave; mains US\$11-15; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☺) This twee little bistro, a veteran of the neighbourhood, whips up some legendary food. European meat and fish dishes predominate.

Drinking

Much of the nightlife is in the northern suburbs, particularly around Melville, Norwood and Rosebank. The area around the cultural precinct in Newtown also has a few decent places.

CITY CENTRE & NEWTOWN

Horror Café (Map p1019; ☎ 838 6735; 5 Becker St, Newtown) The neon-green décor is indeed a horror, but this place is never short of action. Thursdays is reggae night, while Saturday is gay and lesbian night.

Guildhall Bar & Restaurant (Map p1019; ☎ 833 1770; 88 Market St) A great place to soak up some history while stoking the fires with a pint or two of lager. There's an upstairs terrace for people-watching.

MELVILLE

Berlin Bar (☎ 482 9345; 6 7th St) With an ultra-cool design, and Jo'burg's most tortured artists lounging on its retro furniture, this was definitely Melville's hippest hangout when we swung through town.

Ratz Bar (☎ 726 2019; 9B 7th St) This cosy place is only for over-24s. Try one of their tasty and well-priced cocktails (US\$2.40).

Tokyo Star (☎ 834 9187; 78 4th Ave) Anime chic and loads of plastic characterise this trendy, noisy Tokyo-style bar. Asian snacks such as tempura (US\$3) are served.

Cool Runnings (Map p1016; ☎ 482 4786; 27A 4th Ave) Reggae is a perennial favourite in Jo'burg, so it

is no surprise that this franchise of Jamaican-style bars is popular.

NORWOOD

Sundeck Bar (☎ 728 2279; 72 Grant Ave) The upstairs terrace bar at this place is the perfect spot to sip a cocktail and watch Norwood drift by.

Mo Café (☎ 728 8256; Grant Ave) This camp, retro-style affair offers beautiful people and lashings of orange décor. There's a full food menu for late-night munchies.

Entertainment**LIVE MUSIC & NIGHTCLUBS**

Carfax (Map p1019; ☎ 834 9187; 39 Pim St, Newtown; admission US\$9.50) This industrial space symbolises integrated Jo'burg and is one of the hottest club tickets in town, with weekend DJs and a house-oriented music scene.

Kippie's Jazz International (Map p1019; ☎ 833 3316; www.kippies.co.za; Bree St, Newtown; admission US\$7) Kippie's is a 'must do' in Jo'burg as it's one of the best places to see South African jazz talent. Gigs kick off on Friday and Saturday nights at around 9.30pm.

206 Live (Map p1016; ☎ 728 5333; 206 Louis Botha Ave, Orange Grove) Garage, ragga, drum 'n' bass and rock tracks keep the feet tapping here. Next door, 208 keeps the flag flying over the local hip-hop crowd.

THEATRES

Market Theatre (Map p1019; ☎ 832 1641; www.mar.kettheatre.co.za; Bree St) is the most important venue for live theatre in Jo'burg. There are three live-theatre venues here – the Main, Laager and Barney Simon Theatres – as well as galleries, a café and the excellent Kippie's Jazz International (above).

Getting There & Away**AIR**

South Africa's major international and domestic airport is **Johannesburg International Airport** (JIA; ☎ 921 6262; www.acsa.co.za). For more information, including international flight connections, see p1034.

All regular flights to national and regional destinations can be booked through SAA, which also has offices in the domestic and international terminals of JIA.

Smaller budget airlines, including Comair, Kulula, 1Time and Nationwide, also link Jo'burg with major destinations and often have much cheaper fares.

BUS

A number of international bus services leave Jo'burg from the Park Station complex (Map p1019) for Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The main long-distance bus lines (national and international) also depart from and arrive at the Park Station transit centre, in the north-west corner of the site, where you will also find their respective booking offices.

Translux, City to City, Greyhound, SA Roadlink, Greyhound and Intercape service major and minor destinations. With the exception of City to City buses, which commence in Jo'burg, all services that are not heading north commence in Pretoria at the Pretoria station. Some sample fares are Cape Town (US\$51 to US\$63, 19 hours), Durban (US\$17 to US\$28, eight hours), Nelspruit (US\$11 to US\$25, five hours), East London (US\$43, 15 hours) via Bloemfontein (US\$20, seven hours), and Plettenberg Bay (US\$42, 18 hours).

Baz Bus (☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) now services backpackers from Jo'burg.

MINIBUS TAXI

The majority of minibus taxis already use the new road-transport interchange in Park Station over the train tracks between the Metro Concourse and Wanderers St. Because of the risk of mugging, it is not a good idea to go searching for a taxi while you have your luggage with you.

You can also find minibus taxis going in the direction of Kimberley, Cape Town and Upington on Wanderers St near Leyds St; Bulawayo taxis at the northern end of King George St; Pretoria taxis on Noord St; Lesotho, Bloemfontein (and other Free State destinations) on Noord St, east of Joubert Park; and Durban taxis near the corner of Wanderers and Noord Sts.

Getting Around

JIA is located about 25km east of central Johannesburg in Kempton Park. Between 5am and 10pm, buses run every half hour between JIA and Park Station (US\$11, 45 minutes). The area immediately around Park Station is confusing and known for muggings. The **Airport Link** (☎ 884 3957) is a reputable airport shuttle. Taxis are expensive at around US\$43 one way to the northern suburbs. Most hostels will collect you from the airport.

Metropolitan Bus Services

(Metrobus; Map p1019; ☎ 375 5555; www.mbus.co.za; Gandhi Sq) runs services covering 108 routes in the Greater Jo'burg area. Fares work on a zone system, ranging from zone one (US\$0.50) to zone eight (US\$1.40).

If you do take a minibus taxi into central Jo'burg, be sure to get off before it reaches the end of the route and avoid the taxi rank – it's a mugging zone. US\$0.70 will get you around the inner suburbs and the city centre, and US\$1.20 will get you almost anywhere.

Taxis operate meters if they work. It's wise to ask a local the likely price and agree on a fare at the outset. From the taxi rank at Park Station to Rosebank should cost around US\$10.

There has been a very serious problem with violent crime on the metro system, mostly on those lines connecting with black townships. The Jo'burg–Pretoria metro line should also be avoided.

PRETORIA

☎ 012 / pop 1.65 million

At once the 'Afrikaner Jerusalem', former headquarters of the apartheid state, and site of the presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela, the pretty, laid-back city of Pretoria – the administrative capital – carries a remarkable amount of history for its age. Ironically, the city that for so long was a byword for white domination is now home to Thabo Mbeki, the liberated country's black president.

It's just 50km from Jo'burg, and is expected within 15 years to form part of a megalopolis of 20 million people. Yet Pretoria moves at a slower pace than its giant neighbour and remains Afrikaans culturally. Military and educational institutions associated with the capital remain, while the tens of thousands of university students drive Pretoria's vibrant nightlife.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

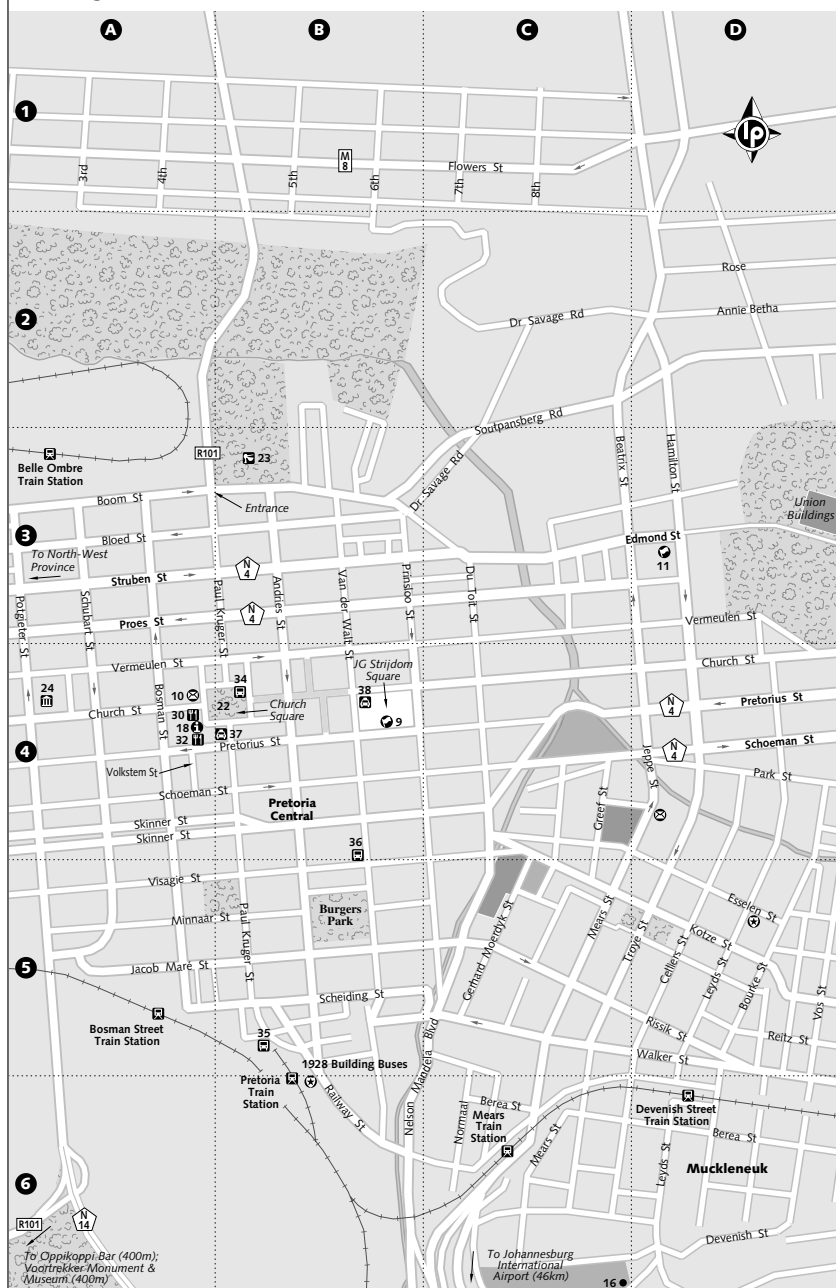
Most hostels and hotels offer internet facilities, but cheaper alternatives are available. **Odyssey Internet Cafe** (☎ 362 2467; Hatfield Galleries, Burnett St; per 30 min US\$2; ☹ 9am–11pm) is a good bet.

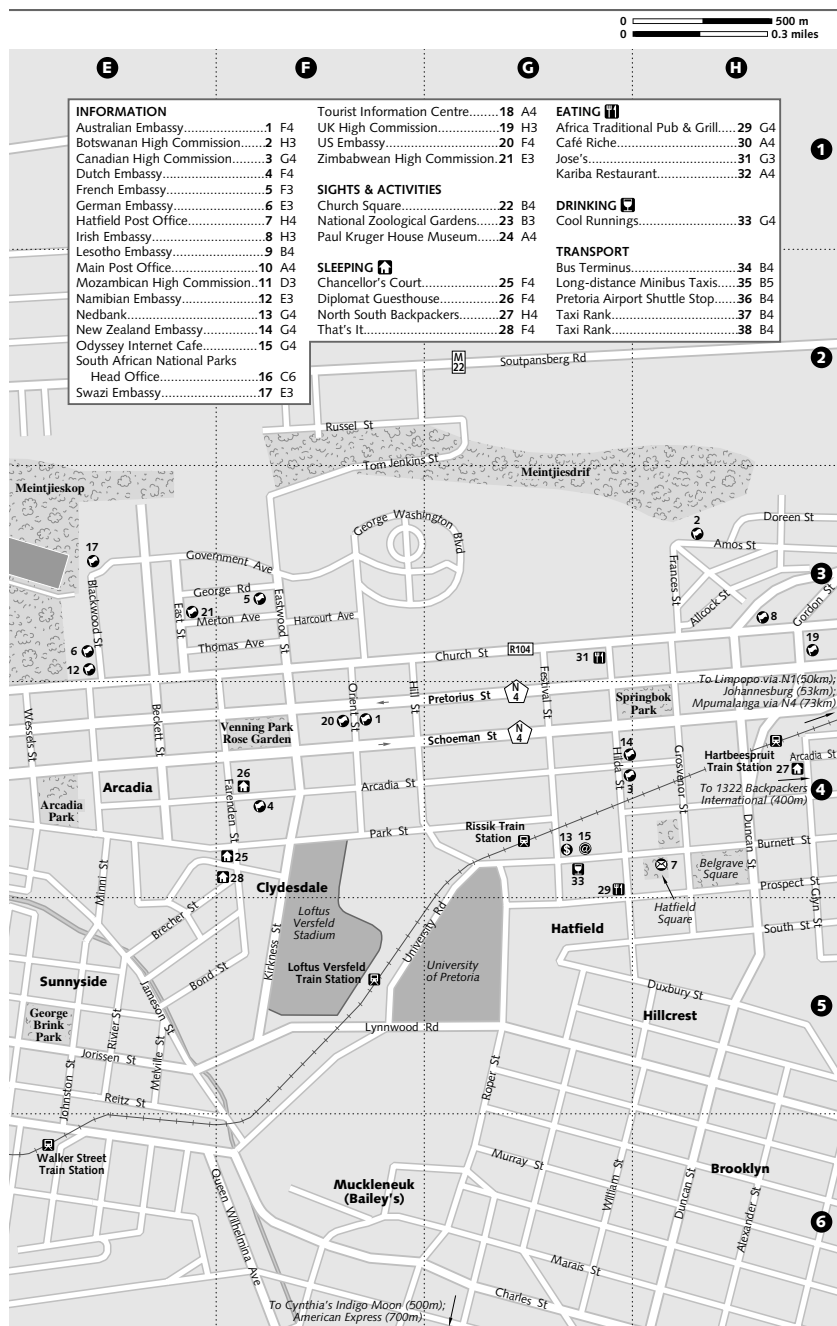
MEDICAL SERVICES

Hatfield Clinic (☎ 012-362 7180; 454 Hilda St) A well-known suburban clinic.

Pretoria Academic Hospital (☎ 011-354 1000; Dr Savage Rd) The place to head for in a medical emergency.

PRETORIA





MONEY

There are banks with ATMs and change facilities across town:

American Express (☎ 346 2599; Brooklyn Mall; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Nedbank (cnr Burnett & Festival Sts) Next to Hatfield Galleries.

POST

Main Post Office (cnr Church St & Church Sq; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The **Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 358 1430; www.tshwane.gov.za; Old Nederlandsche Bank Bldg, Church Sq; ☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) is fairly useless.

The national head office of **South African National Parks** (☎ 428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 643 Leyds St, New Muckleneuk; ☎ offices 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, call centre 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) is the place for all your wildlife-reserve bookings and enquiries.

Dangers & Annoyances

Pretoria is certainly safer and more relaxed than Jo'burg. That said, crime is a problem, particularly in the city centre and Sunnyside, with restaurants and other businesses moving to the safer Hatfield and Brooklyn areas.

The square roughly formed by Vermeulen, Du Toit, Boom and Schubert Sts has a bad reputation.

Sights & Activities

The looming **Voortrekker Monument & Museum** (☎ 323 0682; Eeufees Rd; adult/child US\$3.40/1.40, vehicle US\$1.40; ☎ 8am-6pm) is hallowed turf for many Afrikaners. Built between 1938 and 1949 to commemorate the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838, during which 470 Boers, under the command of Andries Pretorius, defeated approximately 12,000 Zulus, it remains a powerful symbol of the 'White tribe of Africa' and their historical relationship to South Africa.

The monument is 3km south of the city. It is possible to catch the Voortrekkerhoogte or Valhalla bus from Kruger St near the corner of Church Sq. Ask the driver to let you off at the entrance road to the monument, from where it's a 10-minute walk uphill.

Church Square is the heart of Pretoria and is surrounded by imposing public buildings. In the centre, a statue of Paul Kruger (president of the Boer republics during the 1899-1902

Anglo-Boer War) looks disapprovingly at office workers lounging on the grass. A short walk from Church Square on Church St, Kruger's former residence has been turned into the **Paul Kruger House Museum** (☎ 326 9172; 60 Church St; adult/child US\$1.40/0.70; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

About 1km north of the city centre are the **National Zoological Gardens** (☎ 328 3265; cnr Paul Kruger & Boom Sts; adult/child US\$4.70/3; ☎ 8am-6pm). It's an impressive and pleasant enough spot to while away an afternoon, however the highlight is probably the cable car that runs up to the top of a hill that overlooks the city.

Sleeping

Hatfield has developed into something of a backpacker's ghetto, and along with Brooklyn and New Muckleneuk it is the best place to start looking for midrange B&B options.

1322 Backpackers International (☎ 362 3905; www.1322backpackers.com; 1322 Arcadia St, Hatfield; camp site/dm/s/d US\$6/9/13/16; P ☎) A friendly hostel cleverly designed to mimic log-cabin accommodation despite its suburban setting. Dorm beds are made of chunky wood and have their own night lights.

North South Backpackers (☎ 362 0989; info@northsouthbackpackers.com; 355 Glyn St, Hatfield; camp site/dm US\$6/11, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; P ☎ ☎) This hostel is within easy walking distance of the high life of Burnett St, but has a tirelessly convivial buzz of its own. Trimmings include tasty dinners, a savvy travel agency and a pleasant garden.

That's It (☎ 344 3404; www.thatshit.co.za; 5 Brecher St, Clydesdale; s/d incl breakfast US\$42/55; P ☎ ☎) Located near the corner of Farenden St, this pleasant guesthouse in a leafy suburb has good-sized rooms.

Chancellor's Court (☎ 344 1404; www.chancellors.court.co.za; 797 Park St, Clydesdale; s/d US\$47/54; P ☎ ☎) A well-located, reader-recommended guesthouse with spacious (if slightly old-fashioned) rooms. This is a good option for groups or families.

Diplomat Guesthouse (☎ 344 3131; www.thediplomat.co.za; 822 Arcadia St, Arcadia; s/d incl breakfast US\$78/103; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) An early-20th-century home and its beautiful garden are the setting for this immaculately designed four-star guesthouse, filled with impressive-looking furniture.

Eating

Most people head to Hatfield, Brooklyn and New Muckleneuk. There are few eating rec-

ommendations in the city centre, due to safety considerations.

Kariba Restaurant (☎ 326 5654; 1 Parliament St; mains US\$2.80-5.50; ☒ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Based in the beautiful former Capitol Theatre, this efficient restaurant is a lunchtime favourite with local business types, thanks largely to its selection of hearty West and South African dishes.

Café Riche (☎ 328 3173; 2 Church St; mains US\$4-8; ☒ lunch & dinner) This is one of Pretoria's more historic eateries, enjoying a choice spot right in the heart of the city's Church Sq.

Africa Traditional Pub & Grill (☎ 362 1604; cnr Prospect & Hilda Sts; mains US\$5.50; ☒ lunch & dinner) An outdoor deck, good food and traditional African rhythms make this one of the more upbeat, laid-back options in distinctly bourgeois Hatfield.

Jose's (☎ 430 7778; 235 Hilda St; mains US\$8; ☒ lunch & dinner) Platters of delicious Mediterranean foods mean you'll understand why this quality eatery is a local favourite. When it's plate-breaking night (Fridays and Saturdays), you'll understand why there's so much outdoor seating.

Cynthia's Indigo Moon (☎ 346 8926; 283 Dey St; mains US\$7-20; ☒ lunch & dinner) A lot of cows laid down their lives to make this menu possible, but the steak is fabulous, the seafood sublime and the atmosphere cosy and stylish.

Drinking

There are several bars and nightspots in trendy Hatfield, catering for all types. Burnett St offers a high density of bars, eateries and clubs, all cut through with lashings of backpacker bravado and student shenanigans. Reggae rules the roost at **Cool Runnings** (☎ 362 0100; 1075 Burnett St), a perennially popular drinking haunt. **Oppikoppi Bar** (☎ 082-499 7668), on Magasyn Hill (opposite the Voortrekker Monument), is one of the best-located pubs in Pretoria. The views over the city are great, particularly at sunset.

Getting There & Away

Most interprovincial and international bus services commence in Pretoria, unless they are heading north. Translux, Greyhound and Intercape fares from Pretoria are identical to those from Jo'burg (see p1021). If you only want to go between the two cities, it will cost about US\$6. Minibus taxis leave from the main terminal by the train station and travel to a host of destinations including Jo'burg

(US\$4). Because of high incidents of crime, we don't recommend taking the metro between Pretoria and Jo'burg.

Baz Bus (Cape Town ☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) will pick up and drop off at Pretoria hostels.

Long-distance minibus taxis leave from near the railway and bus stations just off Sc Heidelberg St.

Getting Around

Get You There (☎ 346 3175) operates shuttle buses between JIA and Pretoria, day and night about every hour, charging US\$13 to/from hostels and hotels. If you call ahead, most hostels, and many hotels, offer free pick-up.

There's an extensive network of local buses. Fares range from US\$0.70 to US\$0.90, depending on the distance.

There are taxi ranks on the corner of Church and Van der Walt Sts, and on the corner of Pretorius and Paul Kruger Sts.

SUN CITY

☎ 014

Welcome to Sun City, South African style. At **Sun City** (☎ 557 1000; www.suncity.co.za; admission US\$8), the legendary creation of entrepreneur Sol Kerzer, Disneyland collides with ancient Egypt in a demented attempt to look like Vegas. Filled with gilded statues of lions and monkeys, acres of artificial beaches, exploding volcanos and hundreds upon hundreds of clinking slot machines, there's no question this gambling-centric resort is almost grotesquely gaudy, yet a visit here can also be pretty damn fun. Started as an apartheid-era haven for wealthy whites, these days one of the great things about Sun City is the large mix of people who flock here at weekends.

The best part of Sun City is undeniably **Lost City**, which is entered over a bridge flanked by life-sized fake elephants, and basically consists of **Valley of the Waves**, a pool with a large-scale wave-making machine, a sandy beach, numerous water slides and other amusement-park rides. It's cheesy, but fun.

Of course if you've got the cash to splash out, this place also boasts one of the world's most luxurious hotels, but if the Sun City hotels are too expensive (and you have your own transport), consider staying at Pilanesberg National Park or the town of Rustenburg and making the complex a day trip only.

Tiny Pilanesberg Airport is about 9km east of the Sun City complex. **SAAirlink** (☎ 978 1111;

www.saaairlink.co.za) operates flights six times a week from Jo'burg (US\$70) and three times a week from Cape Town (US\$140).

From Jo'burg it's a two-hour drive.

MPUMALANGA

Unassuming Mpumalanga (Place of the Rising Sun) adheres to a quieter pace of life. This inland province, South Africa's smallest, is where the plateaus of the highveld begin their spectacular tumble onto the lowveld plains at the dramatic Drakensberg Escarpment. Many travellers zip through on their way to Kruger National Park, but it's well worth setting aside a few days to explore the historic towns, roaring waterfalls and some of the best hiking trails in South Africa.

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Try to imagine a national park the size of Israel, with huge tracts of acacia, sycamore figs and bushwillow interrupted by open savannah, rushing rivers and the occasional rocky bluff. Now fill it with lions, leopards, elephants, Cape buffaloes and black rhinos (the Big Five), plus cheetahs, giraffes, hippos and many species of smaller animals, and you'll start to have some notion of what it's like to visit Kruger National Park.

The park has an extensive network of sealed roads and comfortable camps, but if you prefer to keep it rough, there are also 4WD tracks, and mountain bike and hiking trails. Even when you stick to the tarmac, the sounds and scents of the bush are never more than a few metres away.

Additionally, as long as you avoid weekends and school holidays, or stick to areas north of Phalaborwa Gate and along gravel roads, it's easy to travel for an hour or more without seeing another vehicle.

Southern Kruger is the most popular section of the park, with the highest animal concentrations and the easiest access. Kruger is at its best in the far north. Here, although animal concentrations are somewhat lower, the bush setting and wilderness atmosphere are all-enveloping.

Information

Accommodation can be booked through **South African National (SAN) Parks central reservations office** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.parks-sa.co.za; 643 Leyds St,

Muckleneuk, Pretoria) or through tourism offices in Nelspruit, Cape Town and Durban. Except in the high season and weekends, bookings are advisable but not essential.

Day or overnight entry to the park costs US\$16/8 for adults/children. Bicycles and motorcycles are not permitted to enter the park. During school holidays you can stay in the park for a maximum of 10 days, and at any one rest camp for five days (10 days if you're camping). Opening times for the ten entry gates vary slightly with the season.

Activities

Although it's possible to get a sense for Kruger in a day, the park merits at least four to five days, and ideally at least a week. There are four short drives, all averaging about four hours, and costing US\$62 per vehicle plus a US\$14 refundable deposit. Better than the drives are guided morning and afternoon **bush walks** (morning/afternoon per person US\$30/24), which are possible at all the larger camps. Kruger's wilderness walking trails are done in small groups (maximum eight people), and guided by highly knowledgeable, armed guides. The walks are not particularly strenuous, covering about 20km per day at a modest pace. Most wilderness trail walks last two days and three nights, and cost US\$340 per person, including food, equipment and accommodation in rustic, pleasant huts. The walks should be booked well in advance.

Sleeping & Eating

Most visitors stay in one of the park's 12 rest camps. These offer camping, plus a range of huts, bungalows and cottages and several other styles of accommodation, as well as shops, restaurants and other facilities. Several of the rest camps have set up satellite camps, which are set some distance away, and are much more rustic, without any facilities.

Huts (two people around US\$32 to US\$39) are the cheapest option, with shared ablutions and communal cooking facilities; bungalows (two people around US\$64 to US\$72) range from simple to luxurious; cottages (up to four people about US\$121) are the next step up in both comfort and price.

Some camps also offer the option of staying in safari tents (two people about US\$32), all of which are furnished, and have a refrigerator and fan.

For those with tents or caravans, camping (camp sites for one to two people US\$14) is available at many rest camps.

There are also five bushveld camps (smaller, more remote clusters of self-catering cottages without shops or restaurants) and two bush lodges, which are set in the middle of the wilderness, and must be booked in their entirety by a single group. Prices range from US\$106 to US\$120 for four people.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there's very luxurious accommodation in many of the private reserves bordering Kruger to the west. Another possibility is to stay outside the park in Hazyview and Nelspruit.

Getting There & Around

Several domestic airlines link Jo'burg (US\$160, one hour), Cape Town (US\$300, 2¼ hours) and Durban (US\$190, 1½ hours) with Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport (MKIA) near Nelspruit (for Numbi, Malelane and Crocodile Bridge Gates), and with Kruger Park Gateway Airport in Phalaborwa (2km from Phalaborwa Gate).

Nelspruit is the most convenient large town near Kruger, and is well served by buses and minibus taxis to and from Jo'burg. Numbi Gate is about 50km away, and Malelane Gate about 65km away. Phalaborwa, in the north on the edge of Kruger, is the gateway for northern Kruger.

Most visitors drive themselves around the park, and this is the best way to experience Kruger. **Avis** (☎ 013-735 5651; www.avis.co.za) has a branch at Skukuza, and there is car rental from the Nelspruit, Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa airports.

NELSPRUIT

☎ 013 / pop 235,000

Nelspruit, Mpumalanga's largest town and provincial capital, sprawls along the Crocodile River Valley in the steamy, subtropical lowveld. There are some good, affordable accommodation options and plenty of restaurants, making it a good place to sort out your stuff while you consider the next direction of your plunge.

Nelspruit Backpackers (☎ 741 2237; nelback@hotmail.com; 9 Andries Pretorius St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$9.50, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; 🍷) combines service, comfort and location, and its travel wing can organise itineraries in the area. A little far from town, though nevertheless

popular, **Funky Monkey Backpackers** (☎ 083-310 4755; www.funkymonkeys.co.za; 102 Van Wijk St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$9.50, s/d without bathroom US\$18/24; 🍷 🍷) is a well-run place in a spacious house. A slightly more upscale option is **Old Vic Travelers Inn** (☎ 744 0993; www.krugerandmore.co.za; 12 Impala St; dm US\$12, d with/without bathroom US\$40/34, 4-person self-catering cottages US\$57; 🍷 🍷), which has self-catering facilities or meals on request, and tents for rent.

Key & Jack (☎ 755 4969; Ferriera St; mains from US\$4; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a lively place with good pub food and a streetside patio. There's live music on Wednesday and Friday nights.

Nelspruit is well served by buses and minibus taxis from Jo'burg, and even has a small international airport. **City Bug** (☎ 741 4114; www.citybug.co.za) operates a weekly shuttle to Durban (US\$51 one-way), and a three-times-daily shuttle between Nelspruit and Johannesburg International Airport (US\$24 per person).

BLYDE RIVER CANYON

The Blyde River's spectacular canyon is nearly 30km long and one of South Africa's most impressive natural features. Much of it is rimmed by the 26,000-hectare **Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve** (admission per person US\$2.80), which snakes north from Graskop, following the escarpment and meeting the Blyde River as it carves its way down to the lowveld. Most visitors drive along the edge of the canyon, with stops at the many wonderful viewpoints, but if you have the time, it's well worth exploring on foot.

Heading north from Graskop, look for **God's Window** and **Wonder View** – two viewpoints with amazing vistas and batteries of souvenir sellers. At God's Window take the trail up to the rainforest (300 steps). The Blyde River Canyon starts north of here, near **Bourke's Luck Potholes**. These bizarre cylindrical holes were carved into the rock by whirlpools near the confluence of the Blyde and Treuer Rivers.

The **Aventura Resort Swadini** (☎ 015-795 5141; www.aventura.co.za; camp site US\$8, plus per person US\$4, 6-person self-catering chalet US\$70; 🍷 🍷) is located at the northern end of the reserve along the Blyde River, and can organise hiking, white-water rafting, abseiling and more.

GRASKOP

☎ 013 / pop 2000 / elevation 1450m

A useful base to explore the dramatic Blyde River Canyon, the quiet town of Graskop is slowly emerging as a tourist destination. The

nearby views over the edge of the Drakensberg Escarpment are hard to beat.

Green Castle Backpackers (☎ 767 1761; <http://home.global.co.za/~graskop>; 63 Eufeyes St; camp site per person US\$5.50, dm US\$8, s/d US\$20/27, without bathroom US\$16/22) has a very communal feel and backpacker vibe, and can arrange great-value safaris to Kruger National Park. Another option is **Autumn Breath** (☎ 767 1866, 082-877 2811; autumnbreath@gmail.co.za; Louis Trichardt St; s/d incl breakfast from US\$28/49), a quaint B&B with a charming restaurant downstairs.

The minibus taxi stand (Main St) is at the southern end of town, with daily morning departures.

NORTHERN CAPE

Covering nearly a third of the country, the vast and sparsely populated Northern Cape surely is South Africa's last great frontier. This is a land of stark contrasts, where the red sands of the Kalahari tumble into the inky waters of the Atlantic Coast, and the Karoo's desolate landscape collides with the sun-scorched lunar landscape of Namaqualand. Lions stalk prey across crimson plains in remote Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park at dawn; in the evening, big orange-ball sunsets made for Hollywood movies steal the show.

KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

If you have the means (namely a vehicle), a visit to the other-worldly **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (☎ 054-561 0021; www.sanparks.org; adult/child US\$16/8) is more than worth the effort it takes to get there. The scenery in this magical place is phenomenal. Proclaimed a national park in April 1999, Kgalagadi is the result of a merger between the former Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and the Mabuasehube-Gemsbok National Park in Botswana, making it one of the largest protected wilderness areas in Africa.

Visitors are restricted to four gravel/sand roads. Make sure to take one of the roads linking the rivers for unobstructed views of the empty expanses of the Kalahari. Visitors must remain in their cars, except at a small number of designated picnic spots.

The best time to visit is in June and July, when the days are coolest (below freezing at night) and the animals have been drawn to the bores along the dry river beds.

Inside the park there are three rest camps and six luxury wilderness camps. All can be booked through the **South African National (SAN) Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria). All rest camps have **camp sites** (per 2 people US\$15, extra person US\$5) without electricity and with shared ablutions facilities. The camps also have a range of huts, bungalows and cottages. The six wilderness camps, though much more expensive, give you the opportunity to really get off the beaten path.

The drive from Upington to Twee Rivieren gate is 250km, with about 60km on dirt roads.

UPINGTON

☎ 054 / pop 53,000

On the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River, orderly and prosperous Upington is a good place to catch your breath on either end of a long Kalahari slog. Wide boulevards slightly cluttered with supermarkets and chain stores line the centre of town, but step onto one of the side streets and you'll enter a world where lazy river views and endless rows of trees create a calm and quiet atmosphere, perfect for an afternoon stroll (if the heat is not too stifling).

Eiland Holiday Resort (☎ 334 0286; tourism@kharahais.gov.za; camp site US\$8, r from US\$20; 📶), the town's cheapest option, offers a range of huts, bungalows and shaded camping spots on tranquil grounds adjacent to the eastern bank of the river. Right on the river with small but comfortable rooms is the **Affinity Guesthouse** (☎ 054-331 2101; www.affinityguesthouse.co.za; 4 Budler St; s/d US\$38/51; 📶 📶).

SAAirlink (☎ 838 3337; www.saaairlink.co.za) flies to/from Jo'burg (US\$260, daily) and to/from Cape Town (US\$260, Sunday to Friday). Buses run to Jo'burg and Pretoria (US\$35, 10 hours, daily), Windhoek (Namibia; US\$34, 12 hours, four times weekly) and Cape Town (US\$30, 10½ hours, four times weekly).

SPRINGBOK

☎ 027 / pop 10,400

Springbok lounges in a valley surrounded by harsh rocky hills that explode with colour in flower season. Outside of flower season there's little to see or do, although the town's remoteness is alluring. The air always feels fresh, the desolate landscape is endearing, and if you step outside at night it will be thoroughly still and quiet.

Annie's Cottage (☎ 712 1451; annie@springbokinfo.com; 4 King St; s/d from US\$25/50; 🍷) has 10 lovely rooms and a quaint pool and garden area. **Cat Nap** (☎ 718 1905; Voortrekker St; dm US\$11, r from US\$40; 🍷), a spacious old home, has a good vibe, and backpackers can shack up in dorm beds in the barn.

BJ's (☎ 718 2270; cnr Van der Stel & Hospital Sts; mains US\$4.70-7; 🍷 lunch & dinner) is a classy basement joint with a cellar vibe, serving tasty steaks.

Intercape has buses to Cape Town (US\$28, 7½ hours, twice weekly) that leave from opposite the Springbok Lodge near the kopje. Buses leave for Windhoek (Namibia; US\$44, 12 hours, four times weekly). **VIP Taxis** (☎ 111 8780) operates a taxi from Springbok to Upington (US\$11, four hours, Monday to Friday).

FREE STATE

This is a place where farmers in floppy hats and overalls drive rusty *bakkies* full of sheep over bumpy roads; where giant fields of sunflowers languish by brightly painted Sotho houses. It's true that Free State doesn't hold any trump cards when it comes to South Africa's not-to-be-missed attractions. In this staunchly Afrikaans region the line between the colours is stark, and dreams of an Afrikaner Arcadia live on. While there's no question that Free State has a long way to travel on the road to racial harmony, even in the smallest rural villages, the once-impenetrable barrier between black and white is beginning to break apart.

BLOEMFONTEIN

☎ 051 / pop 480,499

As the provincial capital of the Free State, and South Africa's judicial capital, tourism in Bloem (as the locals call it) is generally business oriented. But it's also a university town, so when school's in session, nightlife is raging. There's no real reason to go out of your way to visit Bloem, although it has a few interesting sights if you are in the neighbourhood.

Commemorating the 26,000 women and children who died in British concentration camps during the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, the **National Women's Memorial** depicts a bearded Afrikaner, setting off on his pony to fight the British, bidding a last farewell to his wife and baby, who are to perish in one of the camps. It's a powerful image and one still buried in the psyche of many Afrikaners.

Sleeping & Eating

Naval Hill Backpackers (☎ 430 7266; www.navalhillbackpackers.co.za; Delville St; dm/d US\$11/24; 🍷) This is an übercool looking hostel with funky industrial décor. Unfortunately, some travellers report less than gracious treatment by management.

Ansu Guesthouse (☎ 436 4654; www.ansuguesthouse.com; 80 Waverley Rd; s/d US\$30/35; 🍷) The three modern rooms here are light and airy, done up in earthy colours and open onto a leafy garden area where there's a gazebo by the pool.

Hobbit Boutique Hotel (☎ 447 0663; www.hobbit.co.za; 19 President Steyn Ave; s/d incl breakfast US\$80/108; 🍷 🍷 🍷) The charming, old-world Hobbit is the winner of numerous awards; the bedrooms are cottage-style and there are great views from the outdoor patio.

Barba's Café (☎ 430 2542; 16 2nd Ave; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Barba's is recommended by locals and rightly so: the Greek specialities, including chicken souvlaki (US\$5), are delicious.

Jazz Time Café (☎ 430 5727; Waterfront; mains US\$2.80-5; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This hip eatery has an interesting menu, cocktails and jazz recitals in the evenings.

Drinking & Entertainment

As a university town, Bloemfontein has a good range of places to drink, party and listen to live music. The corners of 2nd Ave and Kellner St, and Zastron St and Nelson Mandela Ave bustle with revellers in the evening and compete for the nightlife scene with the Waterfront. **Mystic Boer** (☎ 430 2206; 84 Kellner St) is Bloem's most popular pub and live-music venue. Pizza and burgers provide the fuel.

Getting There & Away

Both **SAirlink** (☎ 433 3225) and **Nationwide Airlines** (☎ 011 344 7200; www.flynationwide.co.za) connect Bloemfontein with Cape Town (US\$160) and Jo'burg (US\$135), in addition to other destinations.

Translux and Greyhound run daily buses to Durban (US\$20 to US\$31, nine hours), Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$20 to US\$27, five hours), East London (US\$24, seven hours), Knysna (US\$36, 12 hours) and Cape Town (US\$43 to US\$48, 10 hours).

Big Sky Buses (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) runs to Maseru in Lesotho (US\$4.70, three hours) twice daily Monday to Friday.

KIMBERLEY

☎ 053 / pop 166,000

An old diamond town with a chequered past, Kimberly is also the capital of the Northern Cape and definitely worth a few days' pause. Step inside one of the atmospheric old pubs with their dark smoky interiors and you'll feel you've been transported back to the rough-and-ready diamond heyday of the late 1800s.

The Big Hole, the area surrounding the largest manually dug hole in the world, was undergoing renovations worth US\$4 million when we stopped by. When completed, the touristy complex, dubbed the **Big Hole Project** (☎ 833 1557; West Circular Rd), will include numerous hotels, restaurants, shops, a cinema and a giant diamond display. As for the Big Hole itself, you'll be able to view it through a glass-enclosed complex with interactive displays and underground experiences. The complex will also incorporate the already excellent **Kimberly Mine Museum**, set up as a reconstruction of Kimberly in the 1880s.

It doesn't have much atmosphere and the rooms are tiny, but **Stay-A-Day** (☎ 832 7239; 72 Lawson St; s/d from US\$15/24) is sparkling clean and you'll feel good knowing profits go towards an orphaned children's home. Most rooms share bathrooms. The **Savoy Hotel** (☎ 832 6211; 15 Old De Beers Rd; r from US\$40) is an old-fashioned place with cosy well-loved rooms. Charming **Edgerton House** (☎ 831 1150; 5 Edgerton Rd; r US\$135; ☎ ☎) has exquisite furniture, African hospitality and a tea garden.

Step back into Kimberly's mining heyday at **Star of the West Hotel** (☎ 832 6463; North Circular Rd; mains US\$4.70; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), an atmospheric city staple that serves up hearty pub grub.

There are regular flights to Jo'burg and Cape Town on SA Express and SAAirlink. Translux, Greyhound and Intercape all have similar fares and routes: Jo'burg/Pretoria (US\$19, seven hours, daily) and Cape Town (US\$31, 10 hours, daily). Minibuses service these and more local destinations.

SOUTH AFRICA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Whatever your budget, you'll generally find high standards, often for significantly less than you would pay for the equivalent in Europe, Australasia or North America.

At the budget level, the main options available to travellers are camping, backpackers hostels and self-catering cottages. The main caveat with places in this price category is that there aren't enough of them; away from tourist areas, sometimes your only budget option is camping.

Midrange accommodation is particularly good value, especially for B&Bs. Expect a private or semi-private bathroom and a clean, comfortable room. Self-catering accommodation at national parks – usually priced in the budget to midrange category – also tends to be very good value.

At the top end, South Africa boasts some of the best wildlife lodges in the region, as well as classic guesthouses and several superb hotels. Places at this level offer all the amenities you would expect for prices that are similar to, or slightly less than, those you would pay in Europe or North America.

PRACTICALITIES

- South Africa uses the metric system for weights and measures.
- Access electricity (220-250V AC, 50Hz) with a three-pin adaptor (round pins, though South Africa has its own unique version); they're easy enough to find – check in camping supply stores.
- Best weekly: *Mail & Guardian*. Best daily: the *Sowetan*. Others to look for: the *Sunday Independent*; the *Sunday Times*; the *Johannesburg Star*; and *Business Day*. Check out *Getaway* magazine for travel news.
- Tune the TV to SABC for the news (SABC3 is mostly English). E-TV has a more independent viewpoint. M-Net has movies and sports.
- SABC radio comes in 11 languages. BBC's World Service is available on short wave, medium wave and (in and near Lesotho) FM.

There are significant seasonal price variations, with rates rising steeply during the December/January school break, and again around Easter, when room prices often double and minimum stays are imposed. Advance bookings are essential during these times. Conversely, you can get some excellent deals during the winter low season, which is also the best time for wildlife-watching.

Be aware that minimum charges apply at many of the accommodation options with the national parks and at other private parks and lodges.

ACTIVITIES

Thanks to South Africa's diverse terrain and favourable climate, almost anything is possible – from ostrich riding to the world's highest bungee jump, to more standard activities like canoeing, kayaking, rafting, mountain biking, rock climbing, whale-watching and wildlife-viewing. Good facilities and instruction mean that most activities are accessible for anyone, whatever their experience level.

Diving

To the west, the main dive sites are around the Cape Peninsula, known for its many wrecks and giant kelp forests. To the east, the main area is the KwaZulu-Natal north coast where – particularly around Sodwana Bay – there are beautiful coral reefs and the chance to see dolphins and sometimes whale sharks. There are several sites off the Eastern Cape coast near Port Elizabeth, and many resort towns along the Garden Route have diving schools.

The best time to dive the KwaZulu-Natal shoreline is from May to September, when visibility tends to be highest. In the west, along the Atlantic seaboard, the water is cold year-round, but is at its most diveable, with many days of high visibility, between November and January/February. Strong currents and often windy conditions mean that advanced divers can find challenges all along the coast.

Hiking

South Africa is wonderful for hiking, with an excellent system of well-marked trails varied enough to suit any ability. Some trails have accommodation – from camping to simple huts with electricity and running water – and all must be booked well in advance. Many have limits as to how many hikers can be on them at any one time.

KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation (KZN Wildlife; ☎ 033-845 1000; www.kznwildlife.com) controls most trails in KwaZulu-Natal. Elsewhere, most trails are administered by the **SAN Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org) or the various Forest Region authorities. To find out about local hiking clubs, contact **Hiking South Africa** (☎ 083-535 4538; www.hiking-south-africa.info).

Surfing

Most surfers will have heard of Jeffrey's Bay, but South Africa offers myriad alternatives, particularly along the Eastern Cape coast from Port Alfred northwards. The best time of the year for surfing the southern and eastern coasts is autumn and early winter (from about April to July).

For more information check out **Wavescape** (www.wavescape.co.za) and **Zig Zag** (www.zigzag.co.za), South Africa's main surf magazine.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime is the national obsession and, apart from car accidents, it's the major risk that you'll face in South Africa. However, try to keep things in perspective, and remember that despite the statistics and newspaper headlines, the majority of travellers visit the country without incident.

The risks are highest in Jo'burg, followed by some township areas and other urban centres. Daylight muggings are common in certain sections of Jo'burg, and the city's metro train system has had a problem with violent crime.

In Jo'burg, and to a lesser extent in the other big cities, carjacking is a problem. The car-jackers are almost always armed, and people have been killed for their cars. Stay alert, keep windows wound up and doors locked at night, and keep your taste in cars modest. If you're stopped at a red light and notice anything suspicious, it's standard practice to check that the junction is clear, and run the light.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

South African Embassies & Consulates

Diplomatic representations abroad include the following. For a full listing see www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/sa_abroad/index.htm.

Australia (☎ 02-6273 2424; www.sahc.org.au; Rhodes Pl, Yarralumla, Canberra ACT 2600)

Botswana (☎ 390 4800; sahcgabs@botsnet.bw; 29 Queens Rd, Gaborone)

Canada (☎ 613-744 0330; www.southafrica-canada.com; 15 Sussex Dr, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 1M8)

France (☎ 01 53 59 23 23; www.afriquesud.net; 59 Quai d'Orsay, 75343 Paris, Cedex 07)

Germany (☎ 030-22 0730; www.suedafrika.org; Tiergartenstrasse 18, Berlin 10785)

Ireland (☎ 01-661 5553; information@saedublin.com; 2nd fl, Alexandra House, Earlsfort Centre, Earlsfort Tce, Dublin 2)

Israel (☎ 03-525 2566; www.safis.co.il; 16th fl, Top Tower, 50 Dizengoff St, 64332, Tel Aviv)

Kenya (☎ 020-282 7100; sahc@africaonline.co.ke; Roshanmaer Place, Lenana Rd, Nairobi)

Malawi (☎ 01-773 722; sahc@malawi.net; 3rd fl, Kang'ombe House, Robert Mugabe Cres, Lilongwe)

Mozambique (☎ 01-490059, 491614; sahc@tropical.co.mz; Avenida Eduardo Mondlane 41, Maputo)

Namibia (☎ 061-205 7111; sahcwin@iafrica.com.na; RSA House, cnr Jan Jonker St & Nelson Mandela Ave, Windhoek -1200)

Netherlands (☎ 70-392 4501; www.southafrica.nl; Wassenaarseweg 40, the Hague 2596 CJ)

New Zealand Representation is accredited from Australia.

UK (☎ 020-7451 7299; www.southafricahouse.com; South Africa House, Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DP)

USA (☎ 202-232 4400; www.saeembassy.org; 3051 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC, 20008) Also consulates in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Zimbabwe (☎ 04-753147; dhacon@mweb.co.zw; 7 Elcombe St, Belgavia, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in South Africa

Most countries have their main embassy in Pretoria, with an office or consulate in Cape Town (which becomes the official embassy during Cape Town's parliamentary sessions). Some countries also maintain consulates in Jo'burg and in Durban.

The following list includes some of the more important embassies and consulates; most are open in the mornings only for visa services, usually between 9am and noon.

Australia (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-342 3740; www.australia.co.za; 292 Orient St, Arcadia, Pretoria)

Botswana High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-430 9640; 24Amos St, Colbyn); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-421 1045; 4th fl, Southern Life Centre, 8 Riebeeck St, City Bowl); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; ☎ 011-403 3748; 2nd fl, Future Bank Bldg, 122 De Korte St, Braamfontein)

Canada High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-422 3000; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/southafrica/; 1103 Arcadia St, Hatfield); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-423 5240; 19th fl, Reserve Bank Bldg, 60 St George's Mall, City Bowl)

France Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-425 1600; france@ambafrance-rsa.org; 250 Melk St, New

Muckleneuk); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-423 1575; 2 Dean St); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; ☎ 011-778 5600; 3rd fl, Standard Bank Bldg, 191 Jan Smuts Ave, Rosebank)

Germany Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-427 8977; 180 Blackwood St; germanembassypretoria@gonet.co.za); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-405 3000; 19th fl, Safmarine House, 22 Riebeeck St)

Ireland Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-342 5062; 1st fl, Southern Life Plaza, 1059 Schoeman St); Consulate in Cape Town (☎ 021-423 0431; 54 Keerom St, City Bowl)

Lesotho High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-460 7648; 391 Anderson St, Menlo Park) Consulate in Jo'burg (☎ 011-339 3653; 76 Juta St, Indent House, Braamfontein) Consulate in Durban (☎ 031-307 2168; 2nd fl, Westguard House, cnr West & Gardiner Sts)

Mozambique High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-401 0300; 529 Edmond St, Arcadia); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; ☎ 011-327 2938, 327 2944; 252 Jeppe St); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-426 2944; 3rd fl, Castle Bldg, 45 Castle St); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; ☎ 031-304 0200; Room 520, 320 West St); Consulate in Nelspruit (☎ 013-753 2089; 43 Brown St)

Namibia (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-481 9100; secretary@namibia.org.za; 197 Blackwood St, Arcadia, Pretoria)

Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-344 3910; www.dutchembassy.co.za; 825 Arcadia St); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-421 5660; 100 Strand St, City Bowl)

New Zealand (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-342 8656; Block C, Hatfield Gardens, Arcadia, Pretoria)

Swaziland High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-344 1910; 715 Government Ave, Arcadia); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; ☎ 403 7372, 403 2036; 6th fl, Braamfontein Centre, 23 Jorissen St)

UK High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-421 7500; bhc@icon.co.za; 255 Hill St, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (Map pp994-5; ☎ 021-425 3670; Southern Life Centre, 8 Riebeeck St, City Bowl); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; ☎ 031-305 3041; 22 Gardner St)

USA Embassy in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-431 4000; <http://pretoria.usembassy.gov>; 877 Pretorius St, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (☎ 021-421 4280; 4th fl, Broadway Industries Centre, Foreshore); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1016; ☎ 011-646 6120; 1 River St, Killarney); Consulate in Durban (Map pp1008-9; ☎ 031-304 4737; 29th fl, Durban Bay House, 333 Smith St)

Zimbabwe High Commission in Pretoria (Map pp1022-3; ☎ 012-342 5125; 798 Merton Ave, Arcadia); Consulate in Cape Town (☎ 021-461 4710; 55 Kuyper St, Zonnebloem); Consulate in Jo'burg (Map p1019; ☎ 011-838 2156; 17th fl, 20 Anderson St)

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January
Human Rights Day 21 March
Good Friday March/April
Easter Sunday March/April
Easter Monday March/April
Family Day 17 April
Constitution or Freedom Day 27 April
Workers' Day 1 May
Youth Day 16 June
Women's Day 9 August
Heritage Day 24 September
Day of Reconciliation 16 December
Christmas Day 25 December
Day of Goodwill 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available in South Africa. Many hostels offer email facilities, and there are internet cafés in every major town. Costs average US\$1.40 to US\$4 per hour. Most top hotels have wireless access and/or broadband (for which they should be able to provide the cable).

MONEY

South Africa's currency is the rand (R), which is divided into 100 cents. There is no black market. The coins are one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and R1, R2 and R5. The notes are R10, R20, R50, R100 and R200. There have been forgeries of the R200 note, and some businesses are reluctant to accept them.

The best currencies to bring are US dollars, euros or British pounds in a mixture of travellers cheques and cash, plus a Visa or MasterCard for withdrawing money from ATMs.

There are ATMs in all cities in South Africa, most of which give cash advances against cards belonging to the Cirrus network.

Credit cards are widely accepted in South Africa, especially MasterCard and Visa. Nedbank is an official Visa agent, and Standard Bank is a MasterCard agent – both have branches across the country.

TELEPHONE

South Africa has good telephone facilities. Local calls are relatively inexpensive (about US\$0.10 for three minutes), whereas domestic long-distance calls (from about US\$0.30 per minute) and international calls (from US\$0.90 per minute to Europe) can be pricey. Phonecards are widely available. There are also pri-

vate phone centres where you can pay cash for your call, but at double the rate of public phones. International calls are cheaper after 8pm on weekdays, and between 8pm Friday and 8am Monday. For reverse-charge calls, dial ☎ 0-120.

The mobile-phone network covers most of the country, and the network operates on the GSM digital system.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The main government tourism organisation is **South African Tourism** (☎ 011-895 3000, 083-123 6789; www.southafrica.net), which has a helpful website with news of upcoming events and various links.

For more details on individual provinces, there are provincial tourism organisations, of varying quality. In addition to these, almost every town in the country has at least one tourist office. These are private entities, and rely on commissions for their existence.

Provincial tourist offices include:

Eastern Cape Tourism Board (☎ 043-701 9600; www.ectb.co.za)

Free State Tourism Board (☎ 051-447 1362; www.dteea.fs.gov.za)

Gauteng Tourism Authority (☎ 011-832 2780; www.gauteng.net)

KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Authority (☎ 031-366 7500; www.kzn.org.za)

Limpopo Tourism Board (☎ 015-295 8262, 0860-730 730; www.golimpopo.com)

Mpumalanga Tourism Authority (☎ 013-752 7001; www.mpumalanga.com)

North-West Province Parks & Tourism Board (☎ 018-397 1500, 018-293 1611; www.tourismnorthwest.co.za)

Northern Cape Tourism Authority (☎ 053-832 2657; www.northerncape.org.za)

Western Cape Tourism Board (☎ 021-426 5639; www.tourismcapetown.co.za)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

South Africa is one of the best destinations on the continent for disabled travellers, with an ever-expanding network of facilities catering to those who are mobility impaired or blind. **SAN Parks** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org) has an excellent and inspirational overview of accommodation and trail accessibility for the mobility impaired at all its parks.

Another helpful initial contact is the **National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa** (☎ 011-726 8040; www.ncppdsa.co.za).

VISAS

Visitors on holiday from most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA don't require visas. Instead, you'll be issued with a free entry permit on arrival. These are valid for a stay of up to 90 days.

If you aren't entitled to an entry permit, you'll need to get a visa (also free) before you arrive. These aren't issued at the borders, and must be obtained at a South African embassy or consulate. Allow up to several weeks for processing. South Africa has consular representation in most countries, with a partial listing given on p1031. The website of the South African High Commission in London (www.southafricahouse.com) has an overview of visa requirements, and lists the nationalities that require visas.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for Namibia are not issued at the border, though many nationalities don't require one. Visas for Zimbabwe and Mozambique are available at the borders. (South African nationals don't need a visa for Mozambique.) For Mozambique it's cheaper to arrange your visa in advance at the Mozambican High Commission in Mbabane, or in Nelspruit. Both issue express visas in 24 hours.

If you'll be arranging your visa in advance: Zimbabwean visas take at least a week to issue in South Africa; those for Namibia take two to three days; and those for Botswana take between four and 14 days. Nonexpress Mozambique visas take one week.

TRANSPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

GETTING THERE & AWAY AIR

The major air hub for South Africa, and for the entire surrounding region, is **Johannesburg International Airport** (JIA or JNB; ☎ 011-921 6262; www.worldairportguides.com/johannesburg-jnb). **Cape Town International Airport** (CPT; ☎ 021-937 1200; www.airports.co.za) receives numerous direct flights from Europe, and is becoming an increasingly important gateway. The smaller **Durban International Airport** (DUR; ☎ 031-451 6758; www.airports.co.za) handles several regional flights,

as does **Mpumalanga Kruger International Airport** (MQP; ☎ 013-753 7500; www.kmiairport.co.za) near Nelspruit and Kruger National Park.

South African Airways (SAA; airline code SA; ☎ 0861-359 722, 011-978 5313; www.flysaa.com; hub JIA) is the national airline, with an excellent route network and safety record. In addition to its international routes, it operates regional flights together with its subsidiaries **South African Airlink** (SAAirlink; ☎ 011-978 5313; www.saaairlink.co.za) and **South African Express** (☎ 011-978 5577; www.saexpress.co.za).

Some other international carriers flying to/from Jo'burg (except as noted):

Air France (AF; ☎ 0860-340 340; www.airfrance.fr) Hub: Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

British Airways (BA; www.britishairways.com) Jo'burg (☎ 011-441 8600); Cape Town (☎ 021-936 1200) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London. Also serves Cape Town.

Cathay Pacific (CX; ☎ 011-700 8900; www.cathaypacific.com) Hub: Hong Kong International Airport.

Egyptair (MS; ☎ 011-312 2202, 011-880 4126/9; www.egyptair.com.eg) Hub: Cairo International Airport.

Emirates Airlines (EK; ☎ 011-883 8420; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai International Airport.

Kenya Airways (KQ; ☎ 011-881 9795, 011-571 8817; www.kenya-airways.com) Hub: Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi.

KLM (KL; ☎ 0860-247 474, 011-881 9696; www.klm.com) Hub: Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. Also serves Cape Town.

Lufthansa (LH; ☎ 0861-842 538, 021-415 3506; www.lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt International Airport. Also serves Cape Town.

Qantas (QF; ☎ 011-441 8550; www.qantas.com.au) Hub: Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney.

Singapore Airlines (SQ; www.singaporeair.com) Jo'burg (☎ 011-880 8560); Cape Town (☎ 021-674 0601) Hub: Singapore Changi Airport. Also serves Cape Town.

Virgin Atlantic (VS; ☎ 011-340 3400; www.virginatlantic.com) Hub: London. Also serves Cape Town.

LAND

BOTSWANA

From Jo'burg/Pretoria, **Intercape Mainliner** (☎ 0861 287 287, 021-380 4400; www.intercape.co.za) runs daily buses to Gaborone (US\$20, six hours). A cheaper, but less safe and less comfortable, alternative is one of the minibuses that run throughout the day between Jo'burg and Gaborone (about US\$1.40, six hours) via Mafikeng (North-West Province). In Jo'burg, departures are from Park Station. To do the trip in stages, take a City Link bus from Jo'burg to Mafikeng, from where there are direct minibuses over the border to Lobatse (1½ hours).

LESOTHO

Big Sky Coaches (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) runs two buses daily in each direction between Bloemfontein and Maseru Bridge (US\$4.70, three hours). Via minibus taxi, the quickest connections are from Bloemfontein to Botshabelo (US\$4, one hour), and then from there to Maseru (US\$2, 1½ hours). There are also at least three buses weekly between Jo'burg and Maseru (six to seven hours).

Other useful connections include a daily minibus taxi between Mokhotlong (Lesotho) and Underberg (South Africa) via Sani Pass; and several taxis daily between Qacha's Nek (Lesotho) and Matatiele (South Africa; about US\$2, 45 minutes).

MOZAMBIQUE

Several large 'luxury' buses run daily between Jo'burg/Pretoria and Maputo via Nelspruit and Komatipoort (US\$20 to US\$38, eight to nine hours). These include Greyhound, Intercap Mainliner, Panthera Azul and Translux. Panthera Azul connects Durban and Maputo (US\$31, 8½ hours).

Alternatively, the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com) links Jo'burg/Pretoria, Nelspruit and Durban with Manzini (Swaziland), from where you can get a minibus taxi to Maputo.

The daily (except Saturday) *Komati* train operated by **Shosholozo Meyl** (☎ 0860-008 888, 011-774 4555) links Jo'burg and Komatipoort via Pretoria and Nelspruit (1st/2nd/3rd class from US\$25/17/9, 13 to 14 hours). Once at Komatipoort, you can change to the Mozambican train to Maputo (Mtc15,000, economy class only, five hours), but it's better to take a minibus (US\$3.50, 1½ hours).

Visas for Mozambique are available at the borders. (South African nationals don't need a visa for Mozambique.) It's cheaper to arrange your visa in advance at the Mozambican High Commission in Mbabane, or in Nelspruit. Both issue express visas in 24 hours. Nonexpress Mozambique visas take one week.

NAMIBIA

Intercap Mainliner (www.intercap.co.za) runs four times weekly between Cape Town and Windhoek via Upington (US\$65, 20 hours). It's also possible to travel between Jo'burg and Windhoek with Intercap Mainliner (US\$83, 25 hours) on these same days, with a change of buses in Upington.

SWAZILAND

The best connections are on the **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com), which runs from Jo'burg/Pretoria to Manzini via Nelspruit, and between Durban and Manzini via the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

Minibus taxis run daily between Jo'burg (Park Station), Mbabane and Manzini (US\$0.90, four hours), between Manzini and Durban (US\$16, eight hours), and between Manzini and Maputo (Mozambique; US\$4.50, 2½ hours).

ZIMBABWE

At the time of research, bus services between Jo'burg and Zimbabwe were suspended, due in part to fuel shortages.

GETTING AROUND AIR

In addition to being the international flag carrier, **South African Airways** (SAA; ☎ 0861-359 722, 011-978 5313; www.flysaa.com) is the main domestic carrier, with an extensive and efficient route network to major cities. Its subsidiaries, **SAairlink** (☎ 011-978 5313; www.saairlink.co.za) and **SA Express** (☎ 011-978 5577; www.saexpress.co.za), also service domestic routes.

Domestic fares aren't cheap. In addition to SAA and its affiliates, airlines flying domestically include the following:

1time (☎ 0861-345345; www.1time.co.za) No-frills flights linking Jo'burg with Cape Town, Durban and East London, George and Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town and East London. Also offers car rentals.

Comair (☎ 0860-435 922, 011-921 0222; www.comair.co.za) Operates British Airways flights within Africa, and has flights linking Cape Town, Durban, Jo'burg and Port Elizabeth.

Kulula.com (☎ 0861-585 852; www.kulula.com) Operates no-frills flights linking Jo'burg, Cape Town, Durban, George, Port Elizabeth and Mpumalanga. Also offers airport transfer services and car rentals.

Nationwide Airlines (☎ 0861-737 737, 011-344 7200; www.nationwideair.co.za) Operates in partnership with Virgin Atlantic, and has flights linking Jo'burg, Cape Town, Durban, George, Port Elizabeth, Sun City and Nelspruit.

BUS

Buses in South Africa aren't the deal that they are in many other countries. However, together with the less-appealing minibus taxis, they're the main form of public transport, with a reliable and reasonably comfortable

network linking all major cities. Note that many long-distance services run through the night.

A good alternative to standard bus lines is **Baz Bus** (☎ 021-439 2323; www.bazbus.com), which caters almost exclusively to backpackers and other travellers. It offers hop-on, hop-off fares and door-to-door service between Cape Town and Jo'burg via the Northern Drakensberg, Durban and the Garden Route. It also has a loop service from Durban via Zululand and Swaziland to Jo'burg, passing close by Kruger National Park. Point-to-point fares are more expensive than on the other major bus lines, but can work out to be more economical if you take advantage of the hop-on/hop-off feature.

Along with the main long-distance bus operator **Translux** (☎ 011-774 3333, 0861-589 282; www.translux.co.za), **Greyhound** (☎ 083-915-1200; www.greyhound.co.za), **Intercape Mainliner** (☎ 0861-287 287, 021-380 4400; www.intercape.co.za) and **SA Roadlink** (☎ 011-333 2223; www.saroadlink.co.za) have services connecting most of the major cities. In partnership with Translux, **City to City** (☎ 011-774 3333, 0861-589 282; www.translux.co.za) has taken over the routes that once carried people from the homelands to and from the big cities during the apartheid regime.

Prices rise during school holidays; all lines offer student and senior-citizen discounts, and Intercape has backpacker discounts. Also inquire about travel passes if you'll be taking several bus journeys, and always check with the bus companies to see if they are running any specials, which can sometimes save you up to 40%.

For the main lines, reservations should be made at least 24 hours in advance (72 hours in advance for Intercape Mainliner, and as much in advance as possible for travel during peak periods). It's sometimes possible to get a seat at the last minute, but this shouldn't be counted on.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

South Africa is ideal for driving, and away from the main bus and train routes, having your own wheels is the best way to get around. If you're in a group, it's also often the most economical. Most major roads are in excellent condition, and off the main routes there are interesting back roads to explore. Driving is on the left-hand side of the road, as in the UK, Japan and Australia.

Petrol costs around US\$0.70 per litre, and must be paid for in cash. There is no self-service. An attendant will always fill up your tank for you, clean your windows and ask if the oil or water needs checking, and should be tipped between US\$0.30 and US\$0.70. Along main routes in South Africa there are plenty of petrol stations, many open 24 hours.

South Africa has a horrific road-accident record, with the annual death toll around 10,000 (although some estimates place it at over 15,000). The N1 between Cape Town and Beaufort West is considered to be the most dangerous stretch of road in the country. The main hazards are your fellow drivers, though animals and pedestrians on the roads are another hazard, especially in rural areas.

HIRE

Car rental is relatively inexpensive in South Africa. Rates start at about US\$40 per day, including insurance and 200km free per day. Rental of a 4WD starts at about US\$60. For cheaper rates and unlimited mileage deals, it's best to book and prepay through your agent at home before coming to South Africa.

Around About Cars (☎ 0860 422 0422; www.aroundaboutcars.com)

Avis (☎ 0861-113 748, 011-923 3660; www.avis.co.za)

Budget (☎ 0861-016 622, 011-398 0123; www.budget.co.za)

Europcar (☎ 0800-011 344, 011-574 4457; www.europcar.co.za)

Hertz (☎ 021-935 4800, 011-312 9700; www.hertz.co.za)

Local car-rental companies are usually less expensive, though they tend to come and go. Several are listed below, all with agents in major cities. Also check with backpacker hostels; many can arrange better deals, from around US\$25 per day or less.

Imperial (☎ 0861-131 000, 011-574 1000; www.imperialcarrental.co.za)

Tempst (☎ 0860-031 666, 011-396 1080; www.tempstcarhire.co.za)

LOCAL TRANSPORT BUS

Cape Town, Jo'burg, Pretoria and several other urban areas have city bus systems. Fares are cheap, and routes, which are signposted, are extensive. However, services usually stop running early in the evening, and there aren't many buses on weekends.

MINIBUS TAXI

Minibus taxis run almost everywhere – within cities, to the suburbs and to neighbouring towns. They leave when full and, happily, ‘full’ in South Africa isn’t as full as it is in many neighbouring countries. Most accommodate 14 to 16 people. Driving standards and vehicle conditions often leave a lot to be desired, and there are many accidents. There are also isolated outbreaks of gangster-style shoot-outs between the various companies competing for business. Although things have settled down in recent years, minibuses in some areas and on some routes are still considered highly unsafe, and reports of muggings and other incidents remain a regular feature. Always ask for local advice on lines and areas to avoid before using minibus taxis as transport.

TRAIN

South Africa’s Shosholoza Meyl passenger trains are run by **Spoornet** (☎ 011-773 2944; www.spoornet.co.za), and offer regular services connecting major cities. These are a good and

safe, albeit slow, way to get around, and are more comfortable than taking the bus.

On overnight journeys, 1st- and 2nd-class fares include a sleeping berth, but there’s an additional charge for bedding hire. Alternatively, you can hire a private compartment (which sleeps four in 1st class and six in 2nd class) or a coupe (which sleeps two in 1st class and three in 2nd class) – these are a good way of travelling more securely. Meals are available in the dining car.

Tickets must be booked at least 24 hours in advance (you can book up to three months in advance). Bookings for anywhere in the country can be done at any individual station, or through the **Shosholoza Meyl Reservations Centre** (☎ 0860-008 888, 011-774 4555).

Sample 1st-/2nd-/economy-class fares include: Jo’burg–Durban (US\$34/22/13), Cape Town–Pretoria (US\$70/47/31), Jo’burg–Port Elizabeth (US\$49/33/20). Return fares are double the one-way fares. It’s possible to put a vehicle on board the *Trans Karoo* for an extra US\$180.